



The Concept Plan was developed during the three-day charrette held in September 2006. In it, the ideas and solutions offered by citizens during the charrette workshop were harmonized and refined using the professional expertise of the consulting team.

Introduction to the Old Town Knightdale, NC Concept Plan

SUMMARY

The Concept Plan for Old Town Knightdale envisions vibrant neighborhoods, successful commercial districts, new development that enhances the existing community, and transportation options that meet multiple needs. Residents of Old Town will enjoy the best of both worlds: the authentic physical and social setting of a small town, yet with ready access to shopping and employment that the greater region offers. This combination will make Old Town one of the premier residential areas in the region.

The authentic setting confers a tremendous marketing advantage for Old Town. Few other sites in the Triangle enjoy the elements that characterize the heart of Knightdale: narrow roads shaded by mature hardwood trees, an authentic historical street layout, long-established neighborhoods where residents enjoy peace and quiet with their neighbors. If properly protected and enhanced, this authentic setting will confer a market premium on residences in Old Town, and also heighten business opportunities in the small commercial district fronting the railroad tracks (former downtown).

All elements of the plan are intended to strengthen and complement each other. For example, the value of residential areas is enhanced by appropriate nearby commercial districts and by neighborhood parks. Similarly, commercial areas benefit from the proximity of residential areas and the marketing advantage conferred by appropriate enhancement of the area's visual character.

RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

The strongest single message received from the community during the background interviews and charrette workshop was that citizens in Old Town treasure their neighborhoods. They are concerned, however, about new rental housing, and the compatibility of infill development with the community's existing built pattern, particularly in terms of lot size, house size, and setbacks.

The concept plan proposes to strengthen the existing neighborhoods in Old Town with a combination approach, using regulatory tools, management / programming solutions, and incentives to enhance stable neighborhoods and to help challenged areas.

Regulatory tools include zoning revisions that would ensure the compatibility of infill development with the existing built pattern. These could take the form of a Neighborhood Conservation Overlay District, or simply revisions to the existing UDO to address the items of greatest concern. The overlay district would govern lot dimensions, house size, and setbacks, and possibly additional elements, depending on what residents feel is important; the geographic boundaries of the overlay district and the specific restrictions would be determined largely through neighborhood input. Other regulatory tools include property maintenance standards, some form of rental licensing, and better code enforcement to help protect owners' investments in their homes. Identification and removal of any regulatory barriers that discourage re-investment will also help neighborhoods.

Management and programming solutions could include incentives such as tax abatements in return for rehabilitation of existing homes, a linked-deposit program to assist in financing home improvements, and technical assistance. Home ownership programs to help people move from rental to ownership will increase owner-occupant investment in residences. Institutional partnership in marketing Old Town neighborhoods and creating a recognizable place identity will also enhance the value and stability of the area. Finally, public investments should continue to be made in Old Town neighborhoods to the same extent that public funds are expended on improvements in suburban and outlying areas.

GREENFIELD DEVELOPMENT

The large vacant tract at the north side of the Old Town study area is an excellent opportunity for new development that will enhance the area's identity, adding value both to the existing neighborhoods and to the new construction on the greenfield tract itself. Along the tract's frontage on Knightdale Boulevard, opportunities are highest for new commercial and office space. The site would be developed with a compact, walkable pattern to distinguish it from existing strip commercial development.

Moving south, an active living retirement village or other quality senior housing is proposed as a transition between new commercial/office development along the highway and the existing single-family neighborhoods to the south. No-maintenance patio homes or condos would benefit from a strong market for retirement living options and a highly desirable location near shopping and pleasant neighborhoods.

Closer to the existing single-family neighborhood, new residential would be developed at a similar size and scale to existing houses and lots. A wooded buffer along the stream provides separation between houses and commercial areas; this green space is improved with a greenway trail, dog park, and other amenities. One or more small pocket parks are incorporated into the design of the neighborhood extension; these amenities ensure that lots and residences in this area are at a premium compared to ordinary suburban development. Opportunities for modest density increases may also exist – a block of townhouses fronting on a common green could be integrated within the larger area of new single-family houses without fundamentally altering its character. Another development option for new residential would be conservation lots that reserve significant natural areas in common ownership. On the Concept Plan diagram, the loop road at the western side of the greenfield area shows a likely location for a conservation development; the multiple streams flowing through the site render it less suitable for standard lots and streets.

TRANSPORTATION

The key features of transportation elements in the concept plan are community character, connectivity, walkability, and safety.

The existing historic street grid is preserved where it now exists, and further connections are extended into new greenfield development areas. These street connections are routed through "T" intersections and other diversions to prevent cut-through traffic at unsafe speeds for residential areas.

Smithfield Road and First Avenue are envisioned as "green gateway corridors" whose visual character signals that one is arriving in a special place. Traffic on these minor arterials serving Old Town Knightdale will continue to increase as the greater area develops. For the near term, the concept plan indicates no alterations to these roads. As the traffic load increases, any alterations to accommodate greater volumes should follow context-sensitive road design principles. For example, instead of widening or adding lanes to the entire length of the road, the roads should remain two lanes wide with pocket turn lanes added only at the locations where these are necessary for safety and adequate throughput. This

approach will allow roads to accommodate a higher throughput without higher speeds. Moreover, limiting the amount of widening and reconfiguration of these roads will allow existing tree canopy and other vegetation to be retained.

So that pedestrians can safely walk between Old Town and surrounding areas, sidewalks are added along Smithfield Road and First Avenue, and pedestrian crossing improvements are shown at the intersection of Smithfield and Knightdale Boulevard to allow foot travel to the school, library, and Town Hall. Local residential streets (such as Second and Third Avenues) will continue to use the existing “shared street” approach; under this concept, traffic volumes and speeds are low enough that pedestrians and cars can make way for each other as needed, so no sidewalks are indicated. Greenways will also facilitate pedestrian movement between Old Town and adjacent areas.

In the near term, transit options for Old Town can include paratransit (such as demand-responsive / dial-a-ride services) and extension of existing TTA bus service into the area. For the longer term, the potential rail transit opportunity is maximized via the assemblage of public land adjacent to the rail corridor in the form of a community park in the heart of Old Town (discussed below). If and when definite rail transit system plans become a reality for Knightdale and the region, the assemblage of public-owned land at the park location is in place to allow the development of a transit station at the adjacent railroad corridor. At such a time, zoning changes could be implemented to facilitate redevelopment in accordance with detailed plans for transit needs – whether that takes the shape of park-and-ride facilities or dense transit-oriented development. Meanwhile, the near-term approach allows existing structures and neighborhoods to remain largely undisturbed until more clarity exists regarding transit possibilities.

BUSINESS DESIGN DISTRICT (DEPOT COMMERCIAL AREA)

The Concept Plan foresees the commercial district around the former depot as an amenity that enhances the value of the surrounding residential districts. This district will draw from an increasing customer base as outlying suburbs continue to develop and modest increases in traffic improve commercial viability.

The depot district cannot compete with the highway-oriented shopping centers already so abundant in the area. Instead, retail and service uses in Old Town will need to occupy a different niche. Commercial types that would likely perform well in the depot commercial district are personal service and convenience uses that serve as an amenity to the surrounding residential areas, such as a day care or a small café or coffeehouse; specialty / destination retail – stores that offer unique products not offered elsewhere in the region (as opposed to franchise or chain stores) and therefore are not so dependent on highway visibility; and small professional offices.

Physical improvements, maintenance, and good urban design are key to the success of the depot business district; hence it is indicated on the Concept Plan as a “Business Design District.” Streetscape improvements should reflect good commercial district design, with appropriate street furniture (such as lighting, benches, and trash receptacles). Design standards for the district will ensure that new development is pedestrian-oriented and visually harmonious; for example, all buildings should have a street-front orientation with windows onto the sidewalk and inviting elements such as canopies for visual interest. Street trees and seasonal plantings will also send the message that the public as well as the private sector is investing in the depot district.

A combination of incentives and marketing are used to revitalize the commercial district. Incentives include façade improvement and rehab loans and grants, business micro loans and revolving funds at local banks, Town property tax abatements, retail entrepreneur grants or rental subsidies, and business technical assistance. Marketing approaches include the formation of a business recruitment committee to work with property owners and encourage infill commercial uses, with a focus on those most likely to enhance the overall district and succeed: specialty retail, craft, professional office, and personal & community services. Adequate institutional and regulatory arrangements for parking are also critical to

the success of the depot design district.

Across the street from the depot business district, active uses such as a senior center and day care center provide more daily visitation and enhance the critical mass necessary to achieve a successful commercial zone. Also enhancing critical mass and allowing for expansion, additional area for new commercial development is indicated on the plan diagram to the west of the intersection of Smithfield Road and Railroad Street.

PARKS

In addition to the neighborhood pocket parks in the greenfield area discussed above, a primary site for a new park is along the railroad tracks across from the depot commercial district. Standing under the mature trees on this site, one has an excellent view of the historic depot commercial district, as well as the lovely row of historic houses extending north from the commercial area along First Avenue. This spot, like no other, gives one a visual sense of Knightdale as it was.

This highly visible location should be enhanced with a central public place that gives identity to Old Town, both as a landmark to help people identify the “Heart of Knightdale” and to help unite the neighborhoods on either side of the railroad. Physical improvements could include an outdoor gathering place, such as a small amphitheater with a lawn, for outdoor movies, festivals, and special events; it could also serve as a multi-purpose play area and picnic spot at other times. Tot swings and picnic tables or a shelter might also be located in the park. Another improvement that would serve as a landmark and promote community identity would be a reconstructed or relocated railroad depot, which could house a community-serving or public use, or serve as a rental facility for special events.

IMPLEMENTATION

To achieve the vision outlined in the Concept Plan, it is necessary that public policy, including regulations, programming, and budgeting, promote the goals and objectives of the plan. This includes such items as zoning and related development regulations, including tree preservation standards and infrastructure requirements, which should promote the community’s goals for visual character and built form, encourage re-investment in existing neighborhoods, and assure that nearby property owners are given sufficient notice of proposed changes that could affect them.

Spending by the Town is also critical. Public investments in Old Town should be made to a similar degree as in more suburban outlying areas. Planning ahead for items that will be funded is necessary to ensure that each year’s budget continues to advance the plan goals, including infrastructure improvements, incentive packages and financing, and operational tasks that will be performed by Town staff or contractors.

The timing and assignment of responsibility is another critical part of implementing the plan. The finalized master plan for Old Town Knightdale will outline key tasks going forward with suggested responsible entities and a recommended implementation timeline.

Finally, a key element of plan implementation is citizen involvement. A plan implementation oversight committee can make regular progress checks and help identify action items and carry them out. The committee members can also serve as liaisons to other institutional and private partners, and their personal networks allow them to serve as informal facilitators and communicators to ensure that the wider community continues to be involved as the plan vision becomes reality.

CONCEPT PLAN

*Concept Plan for Old Town
Knightdale which emerged from the
September 2006 charrette*

