

## **PLANNING STAFF REPORT**

### **Maple Hill Small Area Plan**

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**Hearing Date:** Planning Board – February 4, 2014  
Board of County Commissioners – February 18, 2014

**Proposal:** The request is to hold a public hearing and adopt the Maple Hill Small Area Plan, recently completed by the Pender County Planning Board, Planning Staff, the Small Area Plan Steering Committee, citizens and stakeholders of the Maple Hill community.

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**Background:** A Small Area Plan is a document where a group of individuals analyzes, evaluates, reviews the constraints and opportunities, and develops goals and policies beyond the 2010 Pender County Comprehensive Plan within a specified geographic area. The primary purpose of the Small Area Plan is to develop a vision and subsequent actions for implementation that will realize the needs and uniqueness of a specific community.

On January 7, 2013, the Board of Commissioners authorized Planning Staff to move forward with the development of a Small Area Plan for the Maple Hill community. A public kickoff meeting was held on January 26, 2013; the plan was developed over the following 12 months through various community and stakeholder meetings.

On December 9, 2013 the Pender County Board of Commissioners opened a 30 day public comment period for the completed draft plan. The public comment period was closed on January 10, 2014.

A critical component to the Small Area Plan are the goals which will assist the community, planning staff, elected and appointed officials, and community stakeholders. Also included within the Maple Hill Small Area Plan are the Neighborhood Goals and Implementation Steps which are a comprehensive summary of the goals and implementation steps for the community to accomplish the desired outcome. Both documents are included with this report.

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#### **Executive Summary:**

Envision the future of the Maple Hill community; a community that is safe, clean and attractive, offers quality housing, improved infrastructure, ample recreational and open space opportunities, with convenient access to public transit, shopping, services and jobs. These desired qualities are the vision of the Maple Hill Community.

Maple Hill is an unincorporated community located on the northeastern side of Pender County, North Carolina and is the northeastern gateway into Pender County. As one of the oldest and most remote areas in the County, Maple Hill has managed to retain its rural, agricultural nature. The continued growth and vitality of this community is important to the community residents, as well as to Pender County.

The Maple Hill Small Area Plan is intended to help Pender County stakeholders address many of the challenges facing the Maple Hill neighborhood and chart a path to meeting these challenges. To accomplish this, the Plan not only documents existing conditions, but also provides goals and action items to help guide County officials and staff with future policy making, development decisions, and capital infrastructure investments in the Maple Hill community.

The planning effort was spearheaded by the members of the Maple Hill Small Area Steering Committee, who were appointed by the Board of Commissioners. The Committee's stated mission was: to plan, implement, and collaborate on matters related to Maple Hill as a potential growth area. Specifically:

1. Concentrate commercial zoning in the Hwy 53 section of the community;

2. Improve existing infrastructure, proper drainage, and transportation;
3. Strengthen a partnership with local government officials by meeting regularly with County Commissioners; and
4. Showcase the area's unique natural resources, cultural arts, and community sportsmanship.

This Plan is divided into eight major sections; Section I, has provided an introduction to the Plan, the planning process, and the reasoning behind the development of the Plan. Section II sets the stage for the Plan by providing the history and context of the Maple Hill neighborhood. Section III, Plan Development and Community Outreach, documents the efforts that went in to the creation of this Plan and the outreach that was conducted to engage neighborhood residents in the planning process. Section IV provides evaluations of the existing conditions of the neighborhood and documents the current situation of the neighborhood, focusing on the following seven topics:

1. Land Use;
2. Economic Development;
3. Housing,
4. Transportation;
5. Services and Utilities;
6. Parks and Recreation; and
7. Community Heritage and Sense of Place

Section V—Neighborhood Assets and Issues—summarizes the major assets of the Maple Hill community, as well as the most significant challenges the neighborhood faces. Sections VI, VII and VIII then look to the future—identifying the goals designed to meet the identified challenges (Section VI) and outlining the specific action steps that will be taken to accomplish these goals (Section VII).

Finally in order to achieve the neighborhood vision established at the beginning of the planning process, Maple Hill residents and County Planning Staff identified 18 goals necessary to address the neighborhood's most pressing issues, while simultaneously preserving and enhancing the neighborhood assets and qualities that residents are most proud of. These goals, in turn, then provide the basis for the action items identified in Section VII of this Plan.

The Maple Hill Small Area Plan is intended for use as a policy document to provide additional guidance to supplement the Pender County Comprehensive Land Use when the County receives future requests for development approval within the Maple Hill Community.

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**Evaluation:** As outlined in the 2010 Pender County Comprehensive Plan; Small Area Plans are meant to supplement the larger context of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. A Small Area Plan is appropriate for a specific area of the community that has special attributes to be protected, e.g., rural character, historic significance, downtown business district, or an area that is experiencing more significant growth pressures than the community at large.

The following goals and policies within the 2010 Pender County Comprehensive Land Use Plan may be relevant to the goals develop within Maple Hill Small Area Plan:

- **Policy 1A.1.2 :** Encourage development in areas where the necessary infrastructure – roads, water, sewer, and schools - are available, planned or can be most cost effectively provided and extended to serve existing and future development.
- **Policy 1A.1.3:** The County shall actively direct growth towards suitable land areas and away from fragile natural resources areas, conservation areas, and hazardous areas.

- **Policy 1A.1.5:** The County supports a pro-business/pro-growth attitude, balanced by a concern for preserving the natural assets and quality of life factors that make the area attractive to visitors and permanent residents alike.
- **Policy 2G.1.1:** Consider establishing a stormwater/ditch maintenance program coordinated through the County Public Works Department and with the NC Department of Transportation.
- **Policy 3A.1.2:** To the extent possible, incorporate more flexible zoning categories that establish performance standards and do not exclude uses as much as encourage compatible co-location of uses to encourage sustainable land use patterns. Neo-traditional or traditional neighborhood planning standards should provide for a compatible mix of uses to encourage more livable communities
- **Policy 5A.1:** Pender County shall seek to accommodate the development and appropriate placement of a variety of housing types, including site built homes, apartments, townhouses, garage apartments, accessory living units, and manufactured homes.
- **Policy 8A.1.3:** Establish and/or expand local farmers' markets that support local farmers by marketing products to local consumers.
- **Policy 8A.1.4:** Encourage agri-tourism business and on-site sale of agricultural products and related services.
- **Policy 10A.1.4:** Support agricultural extension efforts to support existing farming operations and to expand agri-business opportunities.

**Staff Recommendation:** Staff respectfully recommends approval of the Maple Hill Small Area Plan as described in the staff report and attachments.

**Planning Board**

Motion: \_\_\_\_\_ Seconded: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Denied: \_\_\_\_\_ Unanimous: \_\_\_\_\_

Williams: \_\_\_\_ McClammy: \_\_\_\_ Boney: \_\_\_\_ Baker: \_\_\_\_ Edens: \_\_\_\_ Marshburn: \_\_\_\_ Nalee: \_\_\_\_