CHAPTER 2: KEY PLANNING INFLUENCES AND COMMUNITY VISION



INTRODUCTION

The goals, policies, and strategies included within this Plan were developed from a combination of ideas shared by residents via multiple engagement events and planning insights generated from technical analyses. The community identified critical objectives the County should strive to achieve, while data and trends revealed issues and opportunities to address in the plan. Collectively, they serve as the foundations for the Plan and were utilized to create the new Henrico County vision which focuses on four key themes:

- Our Environment
- Managed and Sustainable Growth
- Safe and Connected Spaces
- High-Quality, Livable Places

This chapter provides a summary of the key planning influences that guided development of the Plan and identifies a community vision articulating what Henrico County aspires to become by 2045.

KEY PLANNING INFLUENCES

Through the HenricoNEXT process, several key factors emerged that strongly impacted the overall direction of the Plan. They reflect ideas and input from residents, as well as new conditions and market realities many maturing communities across the country are facing. The specific planning influences discussed in this section are:

- Aspirations of the Community
- Changing Real Estate Markets
- Land Planning Shift to Infill and Redevelopment
- Expanding Mobility Options
- Maintaining Fiscal Health and Prosperity

ASPIRATIONS OF COMMUNITY

This HenricoNEXT Comprehensive Plan is built upon input gathered from our residents and local stakeholders regarding Henrico County's future. The following activities were conducted to gain a better understanding of the community's long-term vision (note that all referenced numbers are rounded):

- **Community Surveys:** In 2021, Henrico County commissioned two professionally conducted surveys through Virginia Commonwealth University's Survey Evaluation and Research Laboratory (SERL). The "Residents' Survey," sent to 1,000 randomly

selected residential addresses per magisterial district, was created to receive community feedback about important topics to be covered in the Plan. A "Recreation and Parks Survey," sent to 800 randomly selected residential addresses per magisterial district, was undertaken to determine use of and satisfaction with the County's recreational offerings.

- **HenricoNEXT Website:** A project website (www.HenricoNEXT.us) was launched in August 2021. A landing page for all things related to the comprehensive plan update, the website also contained an interactive map so residents could offer comments and suggestions on specific areas of the County. Almost 500 observations were recorded. In addition to providing opportunities for residents' comments, completed background reports and presentations were posted, allowing all stakeholders the ability to remain current with the status of the HenricoNEXT process.

- **Community Engagement:** In March 2022, the first engagement period for HenricoNEXT was launched at an in-person visioning workshop. Online polling, which provided the same activities as the community workshop, was available through April 2022. In addition, participants were provided with the opportunity to identify places on a map they would protect (stay the same), change, support the development of new housing, support the development of new businesses and jobs, recommend for public investment (to existing or new facilities such as libraries, community centers, parks, recreational facilities, schools, etc.), and recommend enhanced or added transportation facilities (such as roads, sidewalks, bicycle facilities).

- The activities culminated in over 3,000 comments from 670 individuals. Results were shared in a report entitled "Initial Public Engagement Summary."

- The online polling opportunity was reopened in July 2024 to validate the results of the earlier event and resulted in an additional 4,000 comments from 1,280 respondents. A series of five listening sessions were held in July and August 2024 at area libraries in each magisterial district to gain feedback on the vision and goals identified in this chapter, with over 270 participants indicating they were generally supportive of the plan's focus. Results of the 2024 efforts were shared in a report entitled "Second Public Engagement Summary".

- Building on these earlier engagement efforts, Suggestion Sessions were held in April and May 2025 in each of the County's magisterial districts to gather feedback on the Draft 2045 Future Land Use Map. The sessions attracted 131 attendees, with 62 participants providing a total of 195 comments. After grouping these comments, five key themes were identified: development intensity management, transportation infrastructure, supporting development and revitalization, natural resources, and parks and recreation facilities.

- Planning staff held a Varina-specific meeting on March 9, 2026, at the Henrico Theatre to gain additional input on the goals of each chapter and the proposed Prime Agriculture/Rural Conservation (PA/RC) designation. This event was attended by 116 residents who participated in a series of polling exercises. Results indicated broad support for the chapter goals and PA/RC designation, although opinions varied on the minimum acreage required for the new classification.

- In early June 2026, two countywide open-house meetings were held at Deep Run and Eastern Henrico Recreation Centers to present all the draft chapters. Additionally, information on the creation of an A-2 zoning district that would assist in implementing the PA/RC designation was also provided. Feedback from these in-person meetings and a corresponding online form produced 232 comments directly informing subsequent Plan revisions prior to review by the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

- **Bike and Trails Plan Engagement:** During the first round of community engagement in 2022, the County provided a separate opportunity for residents to review and provide feedback on a draft of the Bike Plan network. The results, which included over 140 comments, was shared in the "Summary of Public Engagement for the Bicycle and Trails Plan" document.

- **Community Outreach:** County staff participated in dozens of community events between 2023 and 2025 to encourage residents to visit the HenricoNEXT website, provide comments through the online map, and complete a resident-led 'Meeting in a Box' exercise as alternative methods of obtaining feedback. Staff also presented information about the plan update to neighborhood associations, business groups, and other civic organizations.

- To date, outreach efforts have engaged approximately 9,000 residents through surveys, 1,950 people through Community Visioning exercises, 270 participants in the Listening Sessions, 131 attendees at the Suggestion Sessions and 116 at the March 2026 meeting at the Henrico Theatre. Through countywide community events, an additional 1,000 people were informed about the HenricoNEXT planning efforts. These engagement efforts were further supported through 14 information sessions, over 9,400 emails, and more than 5,000 mailed notice letters. Additional communications included 29,000 postcards for the March Varina event as well as a countywide postcard mailing to all residential and business addresses (approximately 209,000) for the June community meetings. The County's social media platforms reached an additional 300,000 people.

For more details on these engagement activities and their results, please access the documents mentioned above in the Plan Appendix.

The cumulative feedback from these activities guided the updates to the County's Comprehensive Plan and is outlined on the following pages by category:

- Strong Support for Providing More Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities
- Emphasis on the Value of Providing a Safe Environment for Residents
- Strong Support for Protection of Environmentally Sensitive Lands, Open Spaces, and Rural Areas
- Land Use Management that Facilitates Redevelopment and Infill
- Support for Addressing Affordable Housing Needs

Strong Support for Providing More Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Overall, survey results indicated that residents are satisfied with quality of life and core services in Henrico County. However, there was strong support for providing more opportunities for residents to walk and bike to destinations. In every magisterial district, respondents expressed a desire to bike, walk, and use transit more frequently than they do currently. (See the Residents' Survey for more details on the following findings.)

DESIRE TO WALK AND BIKE

When asked to describe the vision for the County's future in a single word, the top responses from public engagement participants included "walkable" and "bike."

Nearly half of respondents identified biking or walking to destinations as the preferred way to travel in the future. Currently, most residents travel by car but express interest in using other modes of transportation if there were better and safer options available.

NON-MOTORIZED INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

The current dependency on cars and lack of infrastructure for bicycles and pedestrians were identified as two of the County's biggest challenges. Adding sidewalks in neighborhoods and along commercial corridors, providing sidewalks and bike paths that connect non-residential developments to surrounding areas, and creating trails that link residents to parks were among the community's top priorities.

Approximately 43% of survey respondents said they ride bicycles in the County. Issues related to safety and lack of non-motorized infrastructure were the most frequently perceived obstacles to riding more often. Envisioning the future, the community would like a network of facilities, separated from vehicular traffic, that connect key destinations, such as parks, schools, employment centers, and other destinations.

GREENWAYS AND TRAILS

Respondents identified greenways and trails as the County's top recreation and park needs. The survey revealed the community's highest priority for related investments are trails linking neighborhoods with parks. The most frequently used or visited facilities in the County identified during the HenricoNEXT planning process were exercise trails, paved and unpaved trails, and playgrounds.



Greenway

Emphasis on the Value of Providing a Safe Environment for Residents

Residents clearly stated that safety is important and valued in Henrico County and should influence future planning policies. (See the Residents' Survey for more details on the following findings.)

OVERALL SAFETY

When asked what they value most about the County, respondents ranked "Parks, recreation, and the natural environment" (44%) first, while "great place to raise a family" (32%) was second. Participants identified a "safe community" as the third most valued trait (27%). In addition, when asked to identify words that describe their vision for Henrico County's future, "safe" was included in the top five choices. These results show that continued investment in public safety (i.e., fire, police, and emergency services) is a priority for residents.

TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

Community members identified pedestrian safety (40%), automobile dependency (36%), bicycle safety (31%), and access to bike lanes or trails (28%) as their top transportation concerns for the future. Bicycle, pedestrian, and traffic safety were listed as several of the biggest challenges the County faces today. Residents expressed an interest in bicycling more often if they felt safer.

Strong Support for Protection of Environmentally Sensitive Lands, Open Spaces, and Rural Areas

Support was expressed for the protection of the natural environment, including environmentally sensitive lands, open spaces, and rural areas. In surveys, residents gave high marks to the County for its respect for and protection of the environment but also indicated that this area needs improvement and should be emphasized more in the future. The natural environment was also identified as one of the things they value most about the County.

When asked about their top priority planning topics, respondents, who could select multiple priorities, identified protecting the environmental quality of air, water, and land (53%) and

preserving open space and sensitive environmental areas (51%). In particular, residents wanted to see efforts to reduce littering and pollution and the preservation of rural lands.



Open Space

Land Use Management that Facilitates Redevelopment and Infill

The community categorized management of future growth as an important priority for Henrico County. Identified as one of the County's top five planning topics, residents would like to see planning services focus on managing where different types of new development occur. (See the Residents' Survey for more details on the following findings.)

REDEVELOPMENT AND INFILL

The community prefers to see redevelopment and infill development, where new buildings are constructed near existing structures that are already served by utilities. When asked where new development should go, most participants chose growth in these locations both in their magisterial district or countywide. The next highest response (29%) was "prefer no new growth but understand growth can't be stopped." Regarding other topics that should be in the Comprehensive Plan's vision and goals, many participants identified redevelopment as a theme for inclusion.

LAND USES

When asked about five different types of land uses in the County: single-family homes, apartments, industrial, retail, or office development, residents generally thought there was about the right amount of each in the County, although there were some differences by magisterial district.

Support for Addressing Affordable Housing Needs

The community identified affordable housing as a need for the County to address. Participants expressed an interest in improving affordability and providing a variety of housing types, like multi-family, as priorities for the plan update. Supporting development that is affordable to local workers was the fifth priority planning topic identified.



Multifamily Housing

CHANGING REAL ESTATE MARKETS

Employment growth is expected for Henrico County, resulting in a need for additional non-residential space, including office, industrial, and retail. Of these, the smallest projected need is for retail, and the greatest is for industrial and institutional/office land uses.

Population growth is also expected to continue, creating demand for additional housing units, at varying price points, to meet the needs of Henrico County's current and future residents.

In addition to this expected residential and non-residential growth, the following key planning influences were identified by analyzing the "Summary Trends Report," "Housing Assessment," and "Market Assessment." For more details on these reports, please access the documents in the Plan Appendix.

The cumulative input from these activities guided the updates to the County's Comprehensive Plan and is summarized on the following pages by land use category: Residential, Retail, Industrial, and Office.

Residential

HOUSING STOCK AND PROJECTIONS

Since 2019, the amount of housing in Henrico County has grown. Single-family homes represented a larger percentage of total housing in the County, while the percentage of multi-family homes and townhomes remained unchanged during the same time period.

The percentage of total housing units that are rented has decreased since 2019 while the total units that are owned has increased. The vacancy rate is approximately the same for both rented and owned units, both of which have decreased since 2019.

In Henrico County, the average household size decreased between 2015 and 2021. Prior to this, household size had been increasing; however, during and after the pandemic, this growth slowed and decreased slightly. This information can be used to project the need for

more housing units. Projections through 2026 vary by source; Woods and Poole projected a decreasing household size whereas ESRI Business Analyst projected a minor increase.

The country is experiencing a trend of increasing multigenerational households, identified by research from the Pew Research Center, which may lead to increased household sizes in the future.



Single Family Home

HOME VALUES AND HOUSING COST BURDEN

Rents, home values, and median household incomes have all increased since 2019. This is partially due to country-wide inflation and labor demand but can also be attributed to other factors such as increased housing demand and mortgage interest rates.

Since 2019, the share of homes valued under $300,000, has decreased in the County while the median housing value has increased over the same period. This reflects similar trends throughout the United States, contributing to a lack of housing affordability for lower-income residents.

According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), housing expenses are affordable when they are less than 30% of the household income. Costs become "moderately burdensome" when they account for more than 30% of the household income and become "severely burdensome" when they account for more than 50% of income. County-wide, the background reports indicate a smaller percentage of owners are burdened by the cost of their mortgage while a higher percentage of renters are burdened by their housing costs. These burdens increase in certain submarkets of the County, indicating that targeted strategies or land use considerations may be needed.

Retail

Nationally, retail is undergoing significant changes. Steady growth in online sales over the past decade was accelerated by the pandemic. However, the overall share of online spending was relatively small, at approximately 14%.

The quality of retail and its experience is a key driver for demand. Design, mix of offerings, accessibility/walkability, customer experience, and entertainment elements are just some of the factors driving the continual evolution of retail development.

Although Henrico County did not have unmet retail demand, except in a few categories, the larger Richmond region did. As of 2020, Henrico County is estimated to have 27.2 million square feet of retail space. However, future residential development and employment growth could result in demand for additional space adjusted to changing consumer habits.



Retail development

Industrial

Henrico County's top employment industries are health care and social assistance; finance and insurance; retail trade; and professional, scientific, and technical services. The County's percentage of jobs in health care and social assistance (15.68%) was slightly higher than that of the Richmond MSA (14.6%) and Virginia (13.67%), but lower than the United States (17.03%). However, the percentage of jobs in the finance and insurance industry was significantly higher in Henrico County (12.05%) than in the United States (5.37%). Together, less than one percent of County jobs are in the agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting; mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction; and utilities industries.



Industrial Development

According to the Henrico County Economic Development Authority (EDA), the County's growth in the following sectors outpaced both the region and the state, even though several make up a relatively small portion of the County economy:

- Utilities
- Construction
- Manufacturing
- Real estate/rental and leasing
- Professional, scientific, and technical services
- Arts, entertainment, and recreation

In addition, the EDA identified the following industry sectors for recruitment and retention efforts that are consistent with the findings of the "Market Assessment":

- Corporate and regional headquarters
- Advanced manufacturing
- Finance and insurance
- Health and life sciences
- Professional services
- Data centers
- International
- Supply chain management

Office

Nationally, office needs are currently in a state of flux. While recent trends indicate some increase in return-to-office policies, uncertainty remains in the near term due to the continued impacts of remote work brought on by the pandemic. Office absorption is the amount of space or units occupied within a real estate market over a given period. Near the end of 2021, office leasing activity and office absorption in the Richmond MSA region grew for the first time since the pandemic began. In Henrico County, office vacancy rates remained constant according to the completed background reports, although these trends should be monitored as the market continues to shift. As of 2020, Henrico County is estimated to have 22.4 million square feet of office and institutional space, which includes only private sector employment and excludes government.

LAND PLANNING SHIFT TO INFILL AND REDEVELOPMENT

Henrico County has experienced significant growth since adoption of the previous comprehensive plan. Less land is available for development and commercial centers and non-residential centers are aging. Accordingly, future land use planning requires a shift to focus on infill and redevelopment to meet the needs of County residents and employees.



Mixed-use development

An assessment of land status shows that 42% of all parcels in Henrico are developed. Approximately 25.3% of the County's land is available for new development and seven percent has redevelopment potential. This suggests the County is maturing and redevelopment will become a more important part of the County's future. Of the land with this potential, 5.1% is non-residential and 1.7% is residential.

In Henrico County, growth trends over the past two decades indicate a shift from a strong focus on single-family development towards a more diverse mix of unit types, such as townhomes and condominiums. Despite being the largest type of development over the last 20 years, single-family homes no longer constitute a majority of new construction. In the past 15 years, other categories account for a higher percentage of development per square foot, including office, commercial, and apartments. However, the majority of land in the County is dedicated to single-family housing (27.9%) or remains undeveloped, agricultural, or vacant

(45.4%). The remaining include recreation or conserved open space (6.6%), multi-family (including rental apartments, townhomes, attached condominiums, and two-over-twos) (3.7%), employment (3.6%), institutional (3.4%), commercial (3%), public facility (2.8%), and office (1.7%).

These trends and conditions supported the development of the Future Land Use map, and the policy guidance located in the Managed and Sustainable Growth chapter.

EXPANDING MOBILITY OPTIONS

As Henrico continues to grow and evolve, residents have expressed a clear desire for a more diverse, connected, and safe transportation system. Throughout the public engagement process, the community voiced strong support for expanding mobility choices, particularly by enhancing pedestrian, bicycle, and transit infrastructure. Across surveys, workshops, and mapping activities, participants emphasized creating a transportation network that reduces car dependency, improves safety, and provides equitable access to key destinations like parks, schools, employment centers, and commercial areas.

Feedback from the Residents' Survey (2021-2022) indicated that traffic congestion (67%), pedestrian safety (50%), and automobile dependency (36%) were top concerns. Nearly half of respondents (49%) identified connecting non-residential developments with surrounding residential areas through sidewalks and bike paths as a priority. The Recreation and Parks Survey (2021-2022) reinforced these sentiments, with over 62% of households reporting frequent use of exercise trails and 61.9% ranking trails that link neighborhoods with parks as the top recreation need. Safety concerns were a recurring theme: 61% of respondents cited safety as the primary barrier to biking more often, while a lack of continuous pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure was viewed as a critical gap.

Community visioning sessions and interactive mapping activities further confirmed the public's desire for expanded non-motorized transportation options. "Walkable" and "bike" emerged among the most frequently mentioned descriptors of Henrico's desired future. Specific corridors, such as W. Broad Street, Nine Mile Road, and Laburnum Avenue, were identified as needing improvements to enhance safe pedestrian crossings and locations to add dedicated bike lanes. Over 3,000 comments from the initial engagement phase and another 4,000 comments during the second engagement period in 2024 reflected widespread community interest in transforming Henrico into a safer, more accessible place for active transportation.

The Bicycle and Trails Plan engagement specifically revealed support for a comprehensive network of facilities separated from vehicular traffic, ensuring safe and convenient travel by bike or foot. Nearly 43% of respondents reported riding a bicycle in Henrico, yet safety and infrastructure limitations remain significant barriers to more frequent use. Community members advocated retrofitting older neighborhoods with sidewalks, improving crossings, and enhancing wayfinding and lighting along key routes.

The Safe and Connected Spaces chapter of this Plan builds on these community priorities, translating them into specific policies and strategies designed to create a multimodal transportation network that serves all residents. It outlines targeted investments in sidewalks, trails, bike facilities, transit infrastructure, and new programs to improve safety and

accessibility. The chapter emphasizes a coordinated approach to land use and transportation planning, ensuring that future development supports walkability, bikeability, and high-quality transit service.

Henrico's vision for expanding mobility options prioritizes the creation of an integrated, multimodal transportation system that aligns with the community's aspirations. Infrastructure investments will focus on providing safe, continuous routes that connect neighborhoods to key destinations while advancing broader goals for sustainability, public health, and quality of life. By expanding mobility options in an inclusive and community-driven way, Henrico seeks to foster safe and connected spaces that support the County's long-term vision for a vibrant and livable future.

MAINTAINING FISCAL HEALTH AND PROSPERITY

Henrico County has a long history of evaluating the fiscal implications of land use policies. Through future land use planning, the County aims to encourage balanced growth that supports a tax base ratio of at least 65% residential to 35% non-residential. This target ensures Henrico can support future operational and capital investment needs of new growth.

Like the former 2026 Vision Plan, this 2045 Comprehensive Plan process included an evaluation of the fiscal implications of the updated Future Land Use map to ensure it would result in positive outcomes for the County. The HenricoNEXT fiscal study analyzed future costs to serve growth for General Fund-supported services and capital improvements and compares potential future costs to revenues. When analyzed, the new growth modeled in the HenricoNEXT Future Land Use map resulted in a 58% residential and 42% non-residential split, exceeding the target ratio for fiscal health. When the existing tax base is added to new growth, the tax base ratio by 2045 is anticipated to be 67% residential to 33% non-residential. These future land use changes will protect important rural character in Varina, promote redevelopment in aging and established commercial areas, and expand economic development opportunities in targeted locations. Combined, this new future land use direction balances reductions in growth in some areas with additional growth in others, resulting in a projected positive fiscal outcome for the County.

COMMUNITY VISION

The key planning influences are the foundation for Henrico's 2045 community vision. Structured and developed under the following four central themes, they function as guiding tenets for the plan's goals, policies, and strategies:

- Our Environment
- Managed and Sustainable Growth
- Safe and Connected Spaces
- High-quality, Livable Places

OUR ENVIRONMENT

Natural resources, farms, and rural lands are valued for the environmental and working services they provide, picturesque landscapes they offer residents and visitors, and important historical attributes that connect our County to its past. Public and private conservation efforts protect the County's water systems; local food systems; water, air and soil quality; and opportunities for nature and recreation-based economic development.

MANAGED AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Development in the County will focus on revitalizing maturing commercial and employment centers into mixed-use developments in strategic locations. These areas will maximize use of existing public infrastructure, offer new opportunities for economic growth, and provide new housing choices for residents and workers. Growth will be managed and designed to limit impacts on existing neighborhoods and protect natural areas. New developments will be designed to incorporate sustainable and resilient development approaches that are responsive to changing climate factors and market preferences.

SAFE AND CONNECTED SPACES

Transportation options that connect people with centers for employment, shopping, recreation, and neighborhoods will be expanded to offer safe, active modes of travel that support biking and walking, increase access to public transportation, and reduce car dependency. All transportation options will continue to be designed to support safe, efficient, and convenient ways to travel through the County.

HIGH-QUALITY, LIVABLE PLACES

Henrico County will have a strong reputation for offering a variety of high-quality places and spaces that attract workforce talent, support modern household needs, connect neighborhoods to community destinations, and provide many safe and accessible recreation and park opportunities. A strong emphasis on design throughout the community will support a quality of life that is highly regarded within the region.