



Town of Knightdale

Staff Report

Title: River District Small Area Plan & Comprehensive Plan Update

Staff: Donna Goodman, Senior Planner

Date: June 15, 2023

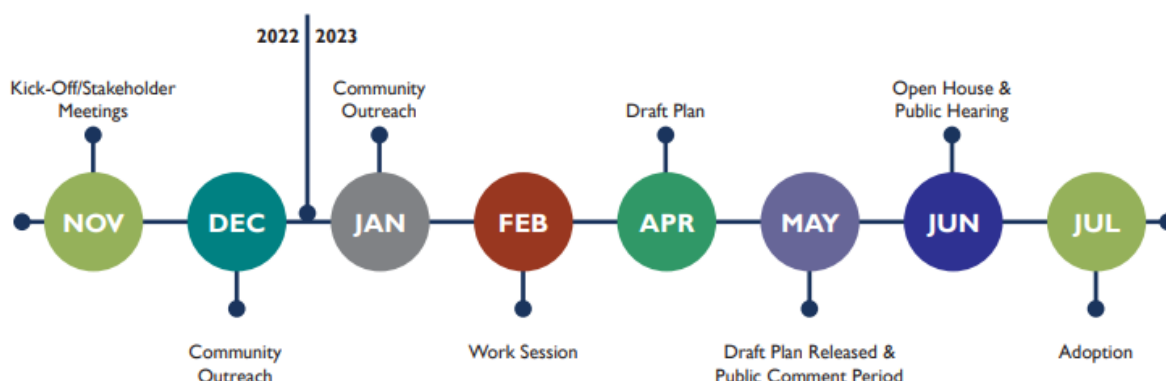
Director Signature: JB

Town Manager Signature: WRS

PURPOSE: To consider approving the River District Small Area Plan and the associated KnightdaleNext 2035 Comprehensive Plan amendment.

RIVER DISTRICT SMALL AREA PLAN OVERVIEW:

The River District Small Area Plan (SAP) kicked off in November 2022 with the first several months focused on public outreach and stakeholder interviews. Staff met with internal and external groups and agencies, some of which include City of Raleigh, NCDOT, developers, HOA representatives, CAMPO, and Wake County. The draft River District SAP was released for public review on May 17, 2023, with the comment period concluding on June 15, 2023. The plan's timeline is shown below, as well as a summary of recommendations.



Guiding Principles

The River District SAP identifies four guiding principles that are critical to the Town realizing the community's vision for this area. These additional guiding principles are intended to build upon and complement the ten existing guiding principles in the Comprehensive Plan. New guiding principles are provided below.



WATER QUALITY

The Neuse River is a key asset to The River District and protecting its water quality is of the upmost importance. The river and the surrounding area provide scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities that can only be preserved through protecting the water. This should be realized through increased stormwater and erosion control, and limited land disturbance. The protection of the river should extend to the countless tributaries, creeks, and wetlands that feed it.



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ACTIVE OUTDOOR LIFESTYLE



The River District provides an opportunity to promote an active, outdoor lifestyle unique to Knightdale. Development within The River District should include investment in parks, greenways, and open spaces as well as infrastructure improvements to provide increased access to these investments for bicyclists and pedestrians. Public Art and other site amenities should promote the active, outdoor lifestyle and encourage recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

PLACEMAKING



For The River District to celebrate its unique characteristics, a strong focus on placemaking is necessary. This includes specific architectural character that is distinct from other parts of Knightdale. The River District should honor the natural environment and encourage developments that “design with nature”. The river should be a focal point and be featured in public art and district signage. Streetscape improvements, public facilities, and art should be a strong focus of public and private investment.

TRAIL AND TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT



The River District should embrace Trail and Transit Oriented Development. Trail Oriented Development includes designing public and private spaces to accommodate trail users and encourages bringing trail connectivity into development. Amenities such as bike parking, outdoor furniture, bike repair stations, public art, and trail improvements are all part of public and private investment in the District. Mixed-use centers in The River District should be Trail Oriented and encourage businesses that serve recreational and commuter trail traffic.

Transit Oriented Development is focused along Knightdale Boulevard and encourages density clustered near transit stops as well as mobility hubs to encourage multi-modal transportation. Mixed-use centers should encourage transit use by clustering residents and employment centers. Businesses should focus on daily needs of nearby residents as well as large employment centers.

Land Use

While the River District contains a mixture of all different land uses, residential zoning and uses are the most prominent. A recurring comment received during public outreach was that more destinations are needed in the district. The idea of a walkable community appealed to many, but walkable destinations are currently missing. Included in the adoption of the River District SAP is an amendment to the KnightdaleNext Comprehensive Plan. Revising and expanding current placetypes on the future land use map will help ensure future developments include additional options to live, work, shop, and participate in civic life. Revisions to the Comprehensive Plan’s Growth and Conservation Map are discussed below in the “Comprehensive Plan Amendment” section.



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Transportation

Many of the transportation recommendations found in the River District SAP come directly from the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) adopted in November 2022. Recommendations are made by mode and focus on creating a walkable community.

- *Transit* – Make transit access improvements (crosswalks and bus stops) and continue preparing for Bus Rapid Transit
- *Bicycle & Pedestrian Facilities* – Many recommendations are taken from the CTP, which includes greenways, sidepaths, crosswalks and Complete Street corridor retrofits
- *Roadways* – The vision for the district’s roadway network is identified in Appendix A of the CTP. Additional recommendations include connections of communities via roadway stubs, contemplating future Neuse River bridge replacements, and monitoring intersections for traffic signal or roundabout improvements.

Open Space

Several great open space amenities already exist within the district and the plan looks at expanding and enhancing those sites.

- *Additional Greenways*: The plan builds on recommendations from the CTP and adds recommendations for greenway along the east side of the Neuse River, a greenway connecting the Legacy Oaks development to Milburnie Park, and filling in existing gaps in the greenway system.
- *Signage and Public Art*: As greenways are built, signage elements, including artistic elements, should be implemented.
- *Additional Parks*: Several opportunities exist for either adding new parks or enhancing existing facilities. Panther Rock Park, the Community Pool site, and NCDOT Mitigation Property are specifically called out in the plan.

Environmental

Environmental protection and water quality are of the utmost importance. The Neuse River is at the heart of the River District SAP and priority should be given to protect both its quality and beauty.

- Implement low impact development practices and green infrastructure standards.
- Limit mass grading requests
- Request additional landscape buffers and tree save areas
- Consider further restrictions to development within the floodplain.

Placemaking

This is an integral component of realizing the vision for the district. Both public and private developments should implement the placemaking elements necessary to identify the River District. Some examples of these elements include:

- Lighting
- Public Art
- Signage
- Building Materials and Architecture



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COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT:

The Growth and Conservation Map organizes the community into different place types, which are prioritized for varying degrees of land conservation and growth that supports a series of existing and proposed mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods and centers that vary in scale and character. To better realize the vision for the River District, several edits to the Growth and Conservation Map are proposed. A map and full explanation of changes is provided on pages 16 and 17 of the draft plan.

- Expand Existing Mixed-Use Centers in the northern and southern boundaries of the district. Expanding the existing Mixed-Use Center in the northwest quadrant of Knightdale Boulevard/Interstate 540 will create a unique activity center with a concentration of mixed housing types and non-residential uses within close proximity to each other. The existing Mixed-Use Center at the northwest quadrant of Hodge Rd. and Poole Rd. should be expanded to the northeast quadrant, allowing the creation of compact, walkable environments that provide residents with increased opportunities for access to nearby goods and services.
- Revise the placetype of the Knightdale Gateway site from Light Industrial to Business Office. This placetype is more appropriate due to the site's location on a main transportation corridor and close proximity to a mixed-use center.
- Add a Neighborhood Node placetype around Needwill Court. This creates future opportunities to provide goods and services to surrounding neighborhoods that are low-intensity, unobtrusive, and at a scale and design compatible with the surrounding developments.
- Introduce a Trail Oriented Development placetype at an existing Mixed-Use Center in the central part of the River District. Development in the northeast quadrant of the Hodge Road and Old Faison Road intersection should prioritize the incorporation and activation of greenways and sidepaths.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

- After receiving public comment, close the public hearing.
- Refer to the July 10, 2023 Land Use Review Board Meeting for advisory statement and recommendation.