

Comprehensive planning at the local, regional, state or national level requires three steps:

- the creation of a vision or statement of the desired goals;
- the preparation of the plan, including a comprehensive inventory of existing conditions and the strategies to be used in achieving the goals; and
- implementation of the plan.

Once identified, the vision will determine the steps to be used in achieving desired goals and developing a well-integrated land use plan. Major tasks incorporated within the Commonwealth's continuing planning process and used in developing and implementing the *Virginia Outdoors Plan* include the following:

Inventory: Open space and recreation facilities should be identified and quantified to assist localities in determining future needs. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) maintains an inventory of such resources and facilities. Critical to the planning process, the inventory is updated every five years.

Demand/need: This is identified by determining the difference between the existing supply and present/future needs as revealed through survey information and census data. Through the development of the *Virginia Outdoors Survey*, DCR maintains data on the demand for many types of outdoor recreation facilities.

Opportunities: Programs and resources are assessed to determine their ability to meet identified needs. Among those areas evaluated are:

Water-based recreation: Water-based recreation accounts for a significant amount of the outdoor recreation activity in Virginia with fishing, boating and swimming among the most popular activities.

Linear recreation and open space resources: Greenways and blueways may include a combination of land and/or water trails, stream valleys, parks and scenic roads. Throughout the state, Virginia's developing trails system links residents and visitors with unique outdoor experiences and significant destinations.

Water trails add to the more traditional hiking, biking and horseback riding activities enjoyed by most trail enthusiasts. Virginia's Byway Program identifies significant road corridors that offer unique cultural and recreational experiences. All qualifying roads should be considered for destinations and included in the comprehensive open space and recreation planning process.

Scenic Rivers: Virginia's rivers are valued for their ecological and economic significance, as well as their aesthetic qualities and recreational potential. The state, localities and citizens work together to evaluate rivers for state Scenic River designation and implement appropriate protection and management strategies. (See Chapter III-A-1, Scenic Rivers on page 66).

Cultural features and landscape resources: Virginia is characterized by a wealth of historic and cultural features. Such features, as well as the landscapes that accommodate them, should be assessed and managed for their economic, educational and resource benefits. Strong partnerships between the private and public sector are needed to maximize the value of these resources to individual property owners and the public.

Natural Areas: Environmentally unique resources are to be accommodated within comprehensive plans. DCR's Natural Heritage Program maintains a database identifying the location, characteristics, specific flora and fauna and the management requirements of each of these areas. Efforts continue to develop a system to identify, classify and protect these unique resources. (See Chapter III-B-2-d, Natural Areas/Natural Heritage Resources on page 133).

The plan should identify the elements contained in the **Standards for Classification of Real Estate** as devoted to open space use under the *Virginia Land Use Assessment Law*, which requires consistency with the land use plan. In this regulation, "land" includes water, submerged land, wetlands, marshes and similar properties. The regulation identifies the following five major open space categories:

Park and recreation use lands: Public, semi-public or privately owned parks, playgrounds or similar recreational areas operated for public or community use, but not facilities operated for profit.



Conservation or other natural resource lands: Lands protected for the preservation of forest and wildlife resources, watersheds, nature preserves, arboretums, marshes, wetlands and similar natural areas.

Floodways: Lands subject to periodic or occasional flooding that accommodate the passage or containment of floodwaters. These may include areas adjacent to floodplains reserved as additional channels for future floods. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation are sources of specific floodplain and floodway information.

Historic or scenic areas: Includes properties on the Virginia Landmarks Register or the National Register of Historic Places, properties protected by scenic or open space easements, sites designated or recommended as scenic by the Departments of Conservation and Recreation, Historic Resources, Transportation or some other state or local agency.

Character landscapes: Lands determined to be of value in shaping the character of the region or the direction and timing of community development.

In addition, the *Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act* and the *Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area Designation and Management Regulations* require tidewater areas to include within their comprehensive plans water quality protection measures that are consistent with the goals of the Act. Public and private access to waterfront areas must also be considered. Thus, through the planning process, localities can enhance water access opportunities and identify locations for future access where impacts to water quality will be minimized. Including the above listed land categories in the comprehensive plan, or community-specific open space and recreation plan, allows local governments to maximize the advantages of the Special Use Tax provisions of the *Code of Virginia, Article 4 of Chapter 32, Title 58.1* and focus on the significance of natural areas and open space as a community resource.

Planning models

Planning models provide guidance for the development of comprehensive land use, as well as open space and recreational planning. The following models were selected for discussion because they best address the issues confronting land use planners in Virginia today.

Development model

Edward McMahon's *Better Models for Development in Virginia*: This model provides a concise guide to accommodating development in a manner that respects and preserves community character, encourages the protection of natural and cultural resources and acknowledges the value to all communities of balancing growth with conservation. The model that offers a thoughtful approach to better development focuses on six principles. These are:

1. Conserve Virginia's natural and scenic assets

The first principle of better development is identifying where not to develop. Successful communities always identify areas that are most important to preserve, whether they are farmland, forests, riparian corridors, natural areas, scenic views, or wildlife habitats. Every community needs an open space protection plan and resources to implement it. Communities that have a blueprint for conservation are more amenable to accommodating growth in areas where it is most appropriate. On the other hand, when citizens think all land is up for grabs, they often oppose develop-