

# ROCKWELL NORTH CAROLINA



## LAND USE PLAN 2022-2042

**Recommended by the Rockwell Planning Board: April 4, 2022  
Town Board Adopted: May 11, 2022**

## **CREDITS**

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# **CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION, MISSION STATEMENT, AND PLAN SETTING**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This document is a statement of the community's vision for its own future and a guide to achieve that vision through the year 2042. The view of the future expressed in the Land Use Plan (i.e., the Plan) is shaped by local community values, ideals and aspirations about the best management and use of the community's resources.

The Plan uses text and a future land use map to establish policies and goals that the Town may use to address the many issues facing the community. Thus, the Plan is a tool for managing community change to achieve the desired quality of life. The Plan is developed pursuant to NCGS 160D-501.

This Land Use Plan, including the Future Land Use Map (FLUM), focuses on land use and development issues facing Rockwell. The following listing of sections outlines the major areas covered by the Land Use Plan (LUP or Plan):

- **Chapter I – Introduction, Community Setting, and Mission Statement** gives an overview of the Town including a brief history, current demographics, plan setting, and implementation goals.
- **Chapter II – Goals and Policies** identifies specific goals and policies intended to guide future growth and development decisions.
- **Chapter III – Suggested Action Items** identifies in items to be undertaken within the Town and its extraterritorial jurisdiction over the next twenty (20) years.
- **Chapter IV- Land Use Goals** to provide consistency and justification for formal actions
- **Chapter V- Plan Administration and Implementation** outlines recommended strategies needed to achieve the Plan’s goals in a manner that is consistent with the Town’s policies.
- **Chapter VI- Future Land Use Map (FLUM)** depicts land use categories, goals, and suggestions in a chart form.

## ***MISSION STATEMENT***

Rockwell's government exists to help its citizens in maintaining the town's unique qualities and to provide superior services to every resident and business.

## ***VISION STATEMENT***

Rockwell remains committed to controlling our own destiny as a distinct, sustainable, and sovereign small town. Nestled between major metropolitan areas (Charlotte, Concord, and Salisbury), Rockwell remains unique. The Town, complete with a very identifiable "downtown" area and a railroad corridor that runs down its spine, embodies many of the attributes that other small communities in fast-growing region wish that they had embraced. Our history and character guide our future.

## ***PLAN SETTING***

### ***History***

The initial location of Rockwell in the southeast portion of Rowan County was determined by the travel routes between Salisbury and Albemarle. Its proximity on a US Highway and railroad corridor marks a half way point between these two cities. Today, Rockwell's Main Street is US Highway 52, a major north-south route. The intersection of Main, Broad, and Depot Streets is the "historic square" of Rockwell from its original layout.

<sup>1</sup>Rockwell was initially founded in 1895 after the arrive of the railroad in 1890 and later incorporated as a "town" in 1911. "Rock Well", had two water wells favored by travelers. The rock well, owned by the Peeler family was located near the present day South State Bank at the corner of Main and Broad Streets. A second well was located near Sides Road and Misinheimer Road at the Miller farm. Well water was used as the public system source until the public system was turned over to the Salisbury-Rowan Utilities in the late 1990's, when all the water wells were closed.

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<sup>1</sup> From a conversation with Tim Linker on October 13, 2021 at the Rockwell Town Hall.

## ***<sup>2</sup>Population Trends***

Rowan County showed a 2020 Census population of 141,675 with an estimated 2022 population of 148,150. That is an increase of 6,475 persons or 0.046%. This is an improvement from the years of 2014-2018 when the population of the Rowan County actually dipped.

Rockwell showed a 2018 estimated population of 2,163 with a 2022 estimate of 2,189. The figures show a steady increase in population.

## ***Background on Development Regulations in Rockwell***

Rockwell first adopted zoning regulations in the 1970's. In 1997, separate zoning and subdivision ordinances were adopted and these included the establishment of an extra territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) area. A major overhaul of these ordinances was undertaken in 2021.

Currently, Rockwell exercises land use regulations within its corporate limits and its established extra territorial jurisdiction (ETJ).

The Town developed its first land use plan in 2002 with a future land use map included. This 2022 version is an update of that plan.

Pursuant to NCGS 160D-501(a), "As a condition of adopting and applying zoning regulations under this Chapter, a local government shall adopt and reasonably maintain a comprehensive plan that sets forth goals, policies, and programs intended to guide the present and future physical, social, and economic development of the jurisdiction.

A comprehensive plan is intended to guide coordinated, efficient, and orderly development within the planning and development regulation jurisdiction based on an analysis of present and future needs."

Accounting to NCGS 160D-501(c) " Plans shall be adopted by the governing board with the advice and consultation of the planning board."

When a comprehensive plan or land use plan in Rockwell's case, is adopted pursuant to NCGS160-501, the Plan is advisory in nature and shall be considered by both the planning board and governing board when considering proposed amendments to its land use

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<sup>2</sup> Figures provided from the community data of the Rowan County Economic Development Commission (EDC)

regulations and for specific action such as the issuance of a special use permit.

### ***Definitions Used in This Plan***

*Goal.* A broad public purpose toward which objectives and policies are directed. Generally, more than one set of actions (i.e., strategies) may be needed to achieve each goal. In this Plan, goals are phrased to express the desired results of the Plan; they complete the sentence "Our goal is..."

*Policy:* Is a statement of government intent against which individual decisions (i.e., action item) are evaluated. A "policy" supports and describes how the stated "goal" will be achieved.

*Action Item.* An individual task or action; which, taken together, will enable the Town to achieve its goals and policies. Action items recommend specific implementation measures.

## ***IMPLEMENTATION GOALS***

Annually, the Planning Board with consultation from the Town Board of Aldermen, will identify specific areas of interest or need to undertake. The Planning Board shall work with town staff to review and draft any recommendations for the Town Board's consideration for amendment, revisions, or additions to its regulatory ordinances or land use plan. Suggestions may come from private citizens as well.

At five (5) year intervals, the Planning Board will review the Land Use Plan and future land use map to identify any needed revisions.

## **Chapter II. GOALS AND POLICIES**

Large areas of undeveloped land are scarce within the Rockwell corporate limits. The opportunities are there for individual parcel redevelopment or in-fill development within Town, however, realistically, any major development will occur within the the Town's ETJ area or in parcels annexed in the future into the Town limits.

That said, any future large-scale development, be it within the Town limits or in the ETJ area, will depend on the ability of the Salisbury-Rowan Utility (SRU) agency to provide the necessary

access and expansion of public water and sewer services. The decision to provide public water and sewer is not within the discretion of the Town of Rockwell. The Town may only suggest and work with SRU. Financial contributions may be necessary by the Town to make development occur. The saying “development costs money” is true.

The things driving land use growth in Rockwell are these items: 1) The interstate improvements on I-85 and its exits at NC Highway 52 and Old Beatty Ford Road make commuting to the job centers faster and easier; 2) The industrial and commercial development occurring and planned along the I-85 corridor (and its exits) in southern Rowan County; and 3) The availability of developable land at a reasonable cost outside of the metro areas of Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties.

The 2002 Land Use Plan focused almost exclusively on the US Highway 52 corridor to Salisbury (and I-85 interstate). Now there are other transportation corridors contributing to the expected growth around Rockwell. However the long-planned 52 By-Pass to the east of Rockwell is not one of them. Any possible route or funding for this bypass is not currently included in any regional or State-wide transportation plan. There is renewed interest in the railroad corridor from Salisbury to Stanly County.

This Plan contains a number of goals, policies, and action items. Together, these statements provide guidance in achieving the Town’s vision of its future. Some of these goals reflect long-standing Town policies. Others identify new directions and actions that are designed to maintain the Town’s high quality of life. The following policy goals are as follows:

1) Plan for Appropriate and Compatible Land Uses

A) Promote quality, well-planned, residential and non-residential developments that will provide long-lasting, long-term benefits to the Town.

B) Rockwell’s commercial corridors should be pedestrian friendly and aesthetically pleasing.

C) Protect the corridors of US Highway 52 and NC 152 to serve as attractive gateways from I-85 into Rockwell.

D) Promote industrial development to even out the expected residential growth for an expanded tax base.

E) Protect residential areas from commercial encroachment with prescribed

buffers and encourage transition methods and uses.

## 2) Downtown Rockwell

Rockwell has a very identifiable downtown that is centered along Main Street (US Hwy 52) and the China Grove Highway (NC Hwy 152).

A) The downtown should be promoted as a unique, mixed-use area where persons can live, work, dine, and shop, all in the same area.

B) Encourage new, renovated, or redeveloped properties and buildings on the the Main Street corridor to have the “look” of “downtown” in character (i.e., are built close to the street with little or no parking to the front of the building).

C) The intersection of Main Street (US Hwy 52), Market Street, and China Grove Highway (NC Hwy 152) has the opportunity for future substantial and impactful development. Coordination of planned uses and development plans should be encouraged.

D) Encourage sidewalks and connectivity to the adjacent residential neighborhoods.

E) Public and civic buildings should remain on or adjacent to Main Street.

## 3) Open Spaces and Recreational Opportunities

A) Use land use planning and regulations to protect existing natural areas including streams, wetlands, farmlands, and floodplains.

B) Protection of the Town’s tree canopy is encouraged. Development should occur in a manner that limits the removal of mature, canopy trees.

C) Recreational areas, improved or passive, should be encouraged and existing ones protected and expanded.

## **CHAPTER III. ACTION ITEMS**

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### 1) Plan for Appropriate and Compatible Land Uses

A) Identify properties to target for industrial development, both expansion of existing sites and possible future sites.



B) Protect the transportation corridors of US Hwy 52, NC Hwy 152, and the railroad corridor from conflicting land uses to prevent issues in the future.

C) Commercial highway corridors should be pedestrian friendly and aesthetically pleasing.

1) Develop building design standards such no blank metal sides on front & sides, tall signs, metal buildings, and large, treeless parking lots. Connect and expand the sidewalk system.

2) Encourage the use of building height, mass and scale techniques to allow new/renovated structures to be compatible with the existing buildings.

3) Designate a highway corridor overlay district(s).

D) Select areas for more dense residential development such as multi-story buildings or attached housing.

E) Require prescribed buffers and setbacks of commercial uses that are adjacent or in proximity of residential areas to insure compatibility.

## 2) Downtown Rockwell

A) Develop/identify more off-street public parking locations.

B) Identify specific parcels/areas for development/re-develop as “mixed-use” - type (commercial/office/residential) projects.

C) Develop specific architectural and site design standards such as “pushing buildings to the street line”; limit parking spaces facing public streets; limit height and mass of buildings; and require the use of natural materials on buildings.

D) Enhance high-speed internet access in the Downtown and adjacent residential areas.

## 3) Open Spaces and Recreational Opportunities

A) Keep land use regulations current. Updates to zoning, subdivision, flood prevention, land use plan, and storm water ordinances should be timely.

B) Develop a pedestrian/bike plan. Sidwalks sections should be connected and expanded.

C) Develop a recreational/open space plan. Seek grant opportunities.

***CHAPTER IV. LAND USE GOALS*** - to provide consistency and justification for formal actions

- Goal 1: To maintain and promote a vibrant and healthy downtown for a variety of retail, commercial, social, cultural, housing, and institutional uses with sufficient parking areas.
- Goal 2: To maintain downtown Rockwell as the community's focal point.
- Goal 3: To plan for aesthetically pleasing and pedestrian friendly commercial corridors that are buffered from residential uses.
- Goal 4: To provide housing choices to accommodate a variety of residential preferences, types, and choices for all income & age groups.
- Goal 5: To limit development activities on environmentally sensitive lands.
- Goal 6: To lessen the effects of climate change on the Rockwell community, particularly the increased severity and frequency of urban flooding and within designated flood plains.
- Goal 7: To coordinate and cooperate with regional and State agencies to insure adequate, sustainable and reliable public facilities and services such as water & sewer, electrical, public roads, and internet and data services to the Rockwell community.
- Goal 8: To promote industrial and manufacturing opportunities that allow Rockwell residents to work and to live in the area.
- Goal 9: To promote high-quality residential development that incorporates landscape buffers, open spaces, and recreational opportunities in a functional and innovative design that includes a mixture of housing types and structures.

## **CHAPTER V. PLAN ADMINISTRATION AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES**

This chapter outlines the implementation and ongoing administration of the Land Use Plan and FLUM map by:

- Describing the processes for monitoring and amending the Plan and *map* over time;
- Explaining specific strategies required to achieve the Plan's goals and objectives; and
- Scheduling the implementation of plan strategies.

### **PLAN MONITORING & AMENDMENT**

The Land Use Plan is intended to serve as a guide for public and private development and land use decisions through the year 2042. As local and regional conditions change, changes to the policies and strategies, as well as to the LUP and map, will be required to keep the plan and map current. Additionally, pursuant to NCGS 160D, zoning decisions must now be justified as consistent and in compliance with adopted planning documents OR the planning document themselves must be changed (amended) so that any decision is in agreement with both development regulations and planning documents like the LUP and FLUM.

Each year the Planning Board establishes its work needs, objectives, and schedule. Within this, the Planning Board will conduct an annual Plan assessment to determine its progress in achieving stated plan goals, objectives and strategies. The Planning Board should also use these review and assessment times to determine whether the FLUM map is still current and reflective of the Town's sentiment and needs or requires adjustments as well.

Amendments to the Plan, the FLUM or the Town's development regulations may also be proposed by the Town Board, Town Staff, and the public as new uses are introduced; development projects are proposed; transportation & technology improvements are made; and/or general economic conditions change that might dictate adjustments to documents.

Issues that might warrant considering whether any Plan amendments are needed include:

- Amendments to the Town's development regulations that may require revisions to the LUP (Plan) and/or FLUM map to remain in compliance;

- Progress in implementing the Plan;
- Changes in community needs and other conditions that formed the basis of the Plan;
- The Town’s fiscal condition and its ability to implement recommendations called for by the Plan;
- Community support for the Plan's goals and policies; and
- Changes in local, State or federal laws that affect the Town's abilities to implement the Plan and its development regulations.

Changes/amendments to the Plan (including the FLUM) should be handled in the same manner and under the same requirements as the Plan’s adoption and as required under the NCGS 160D: the change/amendments should be drafted and presented to the Planning Board for their review and recommendation. Once the changes/amendments are received the Town Board should conduct an advertised legislative public hearing to receive public comments before making a final decision on any changes, if any, should be made to the Plan or the Map.

## **IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**

The following list of strategies should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis to reflect community accomplishments, new approaches to community issues, changing conditions, shifting priorities and new demands.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive or all inclusive rather, it is intended to identify those ideas and suggestions deemed to be of the highest priority that should be pursued by the Town in the future. The strategies shown are not listed in priority order although a suggestion year to accompany is included, as each, if implemented, will provide meaningful long-term benefit to the Town. Notwithstanding the above, actual legislative decisions or implementation strategies made in the future in Rockwell will be at the Town Board’s discretion.

Strategy 1: Year 2022

Adopt building and site design standards within the Zoning Ordinance for the B-1, B-2, B-3, and Industrial zoning districts that will result in non-residential and mixed-use developments that are well designed, in keeping with the Town’s character, and in harmony with neighboring land uses. An important

recommendation should be that Rockwell maintains its unique character and historic significance.

Strategy 2: Year 2023

Establish a commercial corridor overlay along the full length of Main Street and US Hwy 52 including some parcels adjacent to the Main Street and extending to portions of both Market Street and the China Grove Highway (NC Hwy152). Additionally, consider extending the B-2 Central Business zoning district to more parcels along Main Street to expand the “Downtown Focus Area” depicted on the Future Land Use (FLUM) map. This may require some parcels be rezoned.

Strategy 3: Year 2023

Amend the zoning regulations of the B-2 Central Business district to require buildings design and site standards that include among other items buildings address the street, parking in the rear, and building size, mass, and height restrictions. Buildings in a downtown area should look like they belong there. This will require amendments within the zoning ordinance like Strategy 1.

Strategy 4: Year 2024

Evaluate parcels and areas for industrial development, both expansion of existing sites and new future sites with an eye on transportation routes.

Strategy 5: On-going

Encourage infill residential development to occur in areas near the Downtown area. This will serve as a means of spurring development in established portions of the Town where existing public facilities are present and help provide a market for businesses locating in or near the downtown.

## CHAPTER VI. FUTURE LAND USE MAP (FLUM)

The Town's Future Land Use (FLUM) map is indicated on Map 1. The map projects future land use patterns in the Town's planning jurisdiction (i.e., corporate limits and extraterritorial jurisdiction) over the next 20 years through 2042. When reviewing the FLUM map, consideration should be given to the following:

- **Future land uses depicted on the map are not zoning designations** -- they are intended to guide local decisions on zoning, subdivision and other land use matters.
- **Future land uses may reflect a future condition** -- uses designated on the map may be appropriate in 1, 5, 10, or 20 years, but their actual placement may depend on the availability of adequate public facilities, proximity to services, availability of funding, or changing economic conditions.
- **The FLUM Map is dynamic** -- when justified by changing conditions in the community, the future land use map can and should be amended. While map amendments should not be made frequently, periodic adjustments to the map will better achieve community goals and recognize changing situations and development opportunities.
- **The FLUM is generalized in nature**- it is intended to give the reader an understanding of projected generalized land use patterns in a particular portion of the Town of Rockwell.
- **The FLUM map and the Plan text are to be used together** -- the text and tables in this Plan guide interpretation of the FLUM Map.

The FLUM map contains a number of land use categories. These land use categories and their goals and suggestions are described below as follows:

### Future Land Use Categories & Goals

Land Use	Description
<b>Residential, Low-Density (RLD)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This category applies to areas where public utilities may or may not be present. Such areas should primarily be developed with single-family detached dwellings. Minimum lot sizes shall be as governed by underlying zoning.</li> <li>• Public water &amp; sewer service is primarily available only within the Town limits. The Town’s agreement with the Salisbury-Rowan Utility System (SRU) requires a request for annexation into Rockwell be made for the exention of water and/or sewer to serve land parcels within the Town’s ETJ. Otherwise, well and septic permits are required and are issued by the Rowan County Environmental Health Department under their regulations.</li> <li>• Hence areas shown on the FLUM map for development under this classification are primarily located within the Town’s ETJ.-</li> </ul>

<p><b>Residential, Infill (RI)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These are areas of within the Town’s corporate limits where established neighborhoods are located and where higher density levels for a variety of residential type uses would be encouraged.</li> <li>• Public water &amp; sewer are established and there is a high level of public investment such as paved streets, sidewalks, and curb &amp; guttering.</li> <li>• Main Street (US Hwy 52) is the main corridor and where the established residential areas are adjacent.</li> <li>• Encourage existing lots to be subdivided to produce additional building lots (in-fill) to take advantage of established (and paid for) public facilities.</li> <li>• Encourage the renovation and redevelopment of existing housing and vacant lots in established residential neighborhoods to take advantage of established public facilities.</li> <li>• Quality design and compatibility with adjacent areas, particularly the “Downtown Focus Area” are of high importance in such areas. So long as these two criteria plus the availability of adequate public facilities including streets and sidewalks are addressed, appropriate density levels, significantly above those that are found elsewhere in Rockwell, should be allowed.</li> <li>• The purpose of such areas is to establish a significant population base in the vicinity of Downtown Rockwell for business activity and to provide incentives for re-development in established parts of the community.</li> <li>• Sidewalks and bike lanes should be encouraged to promote connective and walkability.</li> </ul>



Land Use	Description
<b>Open Space (OS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open Space areas include the Town’s existing park located north of Ashley Drive.</li> <li>• Major residential subdivisions should have park &amp; play areas within their development.</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional/Civic (IC)</b>	<p>Existing (major) institutional uses are depicted on Map 1 under this category. They include a school located off Link Street; two cemeteries one located on US 52 and a second one on Market &amp; Broad Streets, the Nazareth Children Home; and multiple churches.</p>

**Commercial Corridor (CC)**

- Such areas are located along the Town’s major thoroughfares: US Hwy 52 and NC Hwy 152, and are designed to contain Rockwell’s primary commercial areas.
- Unlike the “Downtown Focus Area”, the Commercial Corridor areas are principally accessed by the automobile customer. Such “gateway areas”, however, should not be developed to look and have the feel of a sprawled commercial strip.
- The Town should adopt design, material, and site guidelines that address these commercial areas so that any development projects built will provide needed retail uses, yet be developed in a manner that promotes Rockwell’s small-town image.
- These areas are adjacent and contiguous to the “Downtown Focus Area”, therefore, there should be a recognizable transition between the two areas with building size, mass, building materials, parking areas, landscape, and buffers taken into consideration.
- Revise the Zoning Ordinances to require a special use permit (SUP) for large buildings & sites.
- Encourage SRU (and contribute funds if necessary) to install a companion gravity sewer line along the northern portion of US Hwy 52 to allow commercial development along this stretch of the “Commercial Corridor”.
- Require sidewalk installation and connections.

**Downtown Focus Area**

- This area is to be promoted for middle-scale, locally oriented businesses and higher-density residential uses in a pedestrian-friendly, “downtown” manner along Main Street (US Hwy 52), China Grove Hwy (NC 152), and Market , Depot, and Broad Streets.
- Building scale and mass should be limited in height/ stories with site placement made to avoid large parking lots facing streets. Building materials should be natural materials.
- Design standards should be developed specially for the “downtown” buildings, both new and redeveloped sites.
- Street accesses should be limited in number and spaced to relief creating traffic congestions on the road corridors.
- Market business types for the local population. Limit large-scale commercial shopping centers and repeat business types to have a variety of businesses that will be utilized by the local residents.
- Boundaries of the area are designated on FLUMap..
- Structures should be built to address the street. Although buffers with residential uses and stormwater concerns should be included in site review.
- Mixed-uses (i.e., residential, office, and retail) developments are encouraged.
- Connect the designated downtown areas to surrounding residential areas by sidewalks. Sidewalks should be install where not currently existing and connecting made to existing sections of sidewalks to make a complete system.
- Town Hall and offices and other public facilities like the public library and post office should remain in the “downtown area”.

Land Use	Description
<b>Manufacturing/ Industrial (MI)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Areas proposed for industrial uses have good access to major thoroughfares and rail corridors and are usually located away from or heavily screened from residential uses.</li> <li>• Public water and sewer serve such areas.</li> <li>• The areas along Broad and Palmer Road, north Hwy 52, China Grove Highway (NC Hwy 152) and the railroad corridor along Red Road are strongly recommended for future industrial/ manufacturing development.</li> <li>• Develop design and apperaranace standards for industrial &amp; manufacturing buildings.</li> </ul>

NOTE: Some changes to the Town’s zoning map and text will be needed in order for the FLUM map to be fully implemented.