CHAPTER 2: GOALS OF THE OPEN SPACE PLAN

The Town has identified five primary goals for the open space plan:

1) preserve 50% of the ETJ as open space;
2) provide public access to 50% of the open space within the ETJ;
3) encourage walkable, mixed-use communities;
4) protect the scenic quality and character of the rural areas; and,
5) protect water quality.

METHODOLOGY

These goals and the resulting Open Space Plan are the culmination of over a year’s worth of field and policy analysis, legal research, several public workshops and many more meetings and work sessions with Town staff, Town Council members and the public at-large.

The process of devising the plan was designed to be a dynamic participatory program combining citizen input with professional analysis and recommendations. The planning process has incorporated an analysis and comparison of the impacts of public sewer vs. individual septic systems, public presentation of the findings of that report, several public visioning and workshop sessions as well as an interim report and presentation discussing the Town’s options for preserving open space. The final steps for this stage of the process are the presentation of the Draft Open Space Plan, public and Town comment upon the draft plan, revisions and a presentation of the final Open Space Plan.

GOALS

The aforementioned goals were generated from a combination of goals expressed in the Davidson Land Plan, those expressed in conversations with elected officials and staff and those voiced during the public open space visioning workshop.

1) PRESERVE 50% OF THE ETJ AS OPEN SPACE

The goal of preserving 50% of the ETH as open space was expressed in the 1995 Land Plan and reiterated throughout the process by town officials and citizens alike. The Land Plan states “[i]n the truly rural areas, the Plan desires to limit development to only 50% of the site area, for only in this way can substantial areas of landscape be preserved for future generations.” Limiting development to 50% of the site area in the ETJ preserves 50% of the ETJ as open space at build-out. The Open Space Plan devises a framework for the
long-term preservation of open space in the ETJ, and therefore addresses open space on a larger, regional scale than the more site-specific Land Plan.

2) **Provide Public Access to 50% of the Open Space Within the ETJ**

Accessibility of open space in the ETJ was identified as a primary goal of the Open Space Plan by Town officials and local citizens during public workshops and during meetings. The Town has expressed a further interest in creating public access to open space in the ETJ in both the Town’s forthcoming Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (AFPO) and the forthcoming Parks and Recreation Plan, which both seek to create public access greenways through the ETJ.

3) **Encourage Walkable, Mixed-Use Communities**

The Land Plan establishes a central issue of creating sustainable development - “how to accommodate growth while maintaining the much valued and ecologically sound small town character.” As a way of achieving that vision, the Land Plan sets a goal of creating a compact and pedestrian-scaled urban form, set in predominantly open landscape.

The primary method of accomplishing the goal, according to the plan, is to use subdivisions to create extensions of the town, that “enhance connections within the community, maintain open communal landscape, promote land and energy conservation and minimize extension of Town infrastructure.”

A vision of mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented developments in the ETJ addresses other goals expressed in the Land Plan, notably enhancing the long-term economic sustainability of the Town by diversifying the local tax base.

2 Davidson Land Plan.


4) **PROTECT THE SCENIC QUALITY AND CHARACTER OF THE RURAL AREAS**

The Rural Neighborhood Area, the ETJ, is designated as a Planning Area IV in the Land Plan. As expressed in the 1995 Land Plan, “the Town’s fundamental policy is to preserve the appearance and, as possible, the productive rural use of this area.” The Open Space Plan goal of protecting scenic quality and rural character is a continuation of this directive of the Land Plan.

5) **PROTECT WATER QUALITY**

The desire to maintain and safeguard water quality within the Town arises from long-held stewardship values by the Town and citizens. The Town has adopted mandatory surface water buffers, further detailed in Chapter 7, in an effort to improve the water quality of both Lake Norman and the Rocky River, the two watersheds that Davidson affects. These community values were further echoed during the public open space visioning meeting where many individuals voiced the need to protect the environment for future generations.

**FIELD ANALYSIS**

The field analysis and resulting viewsheds and vegetation maps were developed through field work done by Land Ethics, Inc. during the summer of 1999. Scenic views and vistas were inventoried by driving all public roads in the ETJ, photographing and noting all scenic vistas, as well as other features such as historic houses and landscapes. The results of the field analysis were reviewed with the public and Town Council in October, 1999. All maps produced for this analysis were reviewed by the Town Planning Department and public input was noted and incorporated into subsequent revisions of the scenic analysis.

Analysis of undeveloped land, scenic views and existing conditions in the ETJ were used to identify the most important segments of open space, as well as those most in need of protection. GIS maps and aerial photographs were combined, showing the undeveloped open space, parcel ownership and natural features within the ETJ. These maps were then used as tools and basemaps for the open space design public workshop in January 2000 and have been used in identifying the most important open space for protection and public access.

**RESEARCH**

The information that has been used to devise this report has come from a wide variety of sources, including, but not limited to, published research, planning and conservation publications, North Carolina state planning laws, other state and local open space regulations, interviews, and input from local citizens.
Public Participation

Visioning

Public participation has been the most important component in devising this plan. The project began with an Open Space visioning/kickoff meeting in August 31, 1999, during which over 75 Town and ETJ residents shared their vision for open space, its benefits and how that open space can be best protected for future generations. Land Ethics presented the detailed field analysis that was completed during visits to Davidson during June and July. The summary of the visioning meeting is included in Appendix A.

Wastewater Treatment Alternatives

The public was again involved in the decision to approve the two new Utility District (CMUD) sewer line extensions - Line #6 and line #32. During the data collection phase of this work task, a public workshop was conducted during October, 1999 to solicit public input about sewer versus septic systems in the ETJ. Over 50 residents and local citizens attended the meeting and participated in another visioning session, discussing the pros and cons of septic and sewer systems.

In November, Land Ethics presented the sewer-septic findings paper to the Town Council and general public. This report did not issue recommendations, but advised the opportunities and constraints of each method of wastewater treatment.

The Town Council concluded, based on the findings of the report, that approving the sewer line was the best method for the Town to achieve its open space and concentrated growth goals.

Open Space Design Workshop

A public open space design workshop was conducted during January 2000 to generate public input about specific locations of preserved open space - both publicly accessible and private open space. Participants broke up into eight groups and developed a graphic plan depicting where open space should be preserved, where the public access should be and where growth can best be accommodated in the ETJ. This workshop generated the basis of the Open Space Plan, developing a general consensus that open space should follow the Rocky River tributaries and floodplain through the ETJ. The critical mass of open space identified by workshop participants has become the core preservation area within the ETJ.

Open Space Preservation Methods

The fourth task in the Open Space Plan process was to identify the methods that the Town can utilize to preserve open space and achieve the five goals discussed earlier. During this work task, federal, state and local regulations were reviewed to identify opportunities and impediments for land open space conservation, as well as to identify possible mechanisms for preserving open space in the ETJ. Included in the process were
numerous calls, interviews and discussions with Town officials, staff, and state and county officials. The culmination of this work task was a position paper, detailing the options available to the town to achieve each of the aforementioned goals which was presented in May, 2000.

A weekend work session with the Town Council and Town staff was held in July, 2000 to discuss each of the options for preserving open space, creating publically accessible open space, developing walkable, mixed-use communities, maintaining scenic quality and rural character and safeguarding water quality. Though the two weekend work sessions were open to the public, the purpose was for the Town Council to assess the options available and decide which to utilize.

The Davidson Open Space Plan is a product of the combination of these elements. The planning process has forced the Town and its residents to confront some very difficult issues and make very hard choices. It is the choices made as a part of this process that will determine not only how Davidson looks in 50 years, but the quality of life for those who live here.