

SEWER AND WATER ELEMENT

Introduction

Water and sewer infrastructure and services are fundamental to the county's ability to accommodate future growth and development. Therefore, it is imperative that the County establish clear policies to guide future decision-making.

This *Sewer and Water Element* was drafted at a time of considerable change and uncertainty in the regional sewer and water landscape. The region is experiencing substantial growth. At the same time the regional economy is in flux, with serious implications for the provision of sewer and water services. The Local Government Council for Cooperative Action (LGCCA) has commissioned the creation of a countywide sewer and water master plan. The City of Hendersonville and the Asheville / Buncombe / Henderson Regional Water Authority are currently reviewing system capacities and considering options regarding the future of their respective treatment facilities located on the Mills and French Broad Rivers. All this is occurring against a backdrop fraught with historical, social, legal and technical complexities.

This Comprehensive Plan does not propose to resolve such complexities, nor does it identify specific, localized infrastructural improvements to be used for near-term capital planning. Rather, the purpose of this document is to provide clarity to Henderson County's position with regard to sewer and water issues and to support ongoing planning activities.

The county's primary sewer and water infrastructure is depicted on Map # 10, *Water Service Areas* (Appendix I), Map # 11, *Sewer Service Areas and Districts* (Appendix I), and Map # 21, *Urban Services Area with Septic Concern Areas...* (Appendix I).

Public Input

The Citizen Survey indicated that respondents strongly favored the management of growth through the strategic placement of such services. They generally agreed that development should be limited where such services are not present and that the County should provide direction to the location of sewer and water infrastructure.

3.86% of Community Meeting comments related to sewer and water, making it the 8th most discussed issue. Approximately 2% of the comments (14th of the top 20 Summary Comments) expressed appreciation for current service and indicated that such services

are essential for continued growth and development in the county. Only 0.37% of comments opposed the presence or expansion of sewer and water services.

The 1993 *Comprehensive Land Use Plan* questionnaire results indicated that respondents ranked the need for additional sewer and water services among the top issues facing the county at the time.

Recommendations & Action Strategies

Recommendation SW-01: Henderson County should take a leadership role in sewer and water planning and work towards the regionalization of water and sewer policy-making and operations.

Current water and sewer policy and planning operate without overarching vision or coordination, resulting in duplication, waste, service gaps, and conflict. Fletcher, Mills River, Laurel Park, and Flat Rock have had little input or involvement in water and sewer decisions which have substantial impact on these communities.

Improvements to the process have been made. An advisory committee for the Cane Creek Water and Sewer District created by Henderson County has greatly improved communication between the District and the Town of Fletcher. Similarly, the 2002 Mud Creek Service Area Agreement and the recent creation of the Joint Water and Sewer Advisory Council (JWSAC) have and will continue to improve conditions. Each of these steps represents the gradual maturation of water and sewer policy and planning in Henderson County. It is crucial that such maturation continue.

The current system has evolved out of necessity. Each of the present systems was established to address specific deficiencies and has developed with little regard for considerations beyond its own service jurisdiction. However, it has become apparent that no single provider can continue to progress in developing its system without the support and cooperation of its neighbors within the county and the region, and all providers seem to acknowledge the need to make decisions and investments for the greater good of the larger community.

Nonetheless, the protection of individual interests is a strong instinct. Hendersonville and other local governments recognize the strategic importance and value of the water and sewer infrastructure. Therefore, the probability of these assets simply being turned over to a regional entity is slight. However, this does not prevent the involved

governments from joining together to efficiently address community-wide issues and effect regional solutions.

Perhaps the best way that Henderson County can improve the situation with regard to sewer and water services in the region is by taking a leadership role in fostering intergovernmental cooperation. Its policies and actions should be calculated to achieve the greatest impact on the entire community, and this is the focus of this and following Recommendations and corresponding Action Strategies.

A. Support the development of a countywide sewer and water master plan.

In recent years there have been several planning initiatives for certain areas of the county by the owners of specific systems. These plans span more than seventeen years and address various elements and aspects of the overall water and sewer service delivery complex. However, none of these plans are comprehensive or regional in scope, and many of the recommendations are no longer relevant for various reasons. A comprehensive, county-wide sewer and water master plan is needed to establish relevant County policy and to coordinate with the county's municipalities and neighboring jurisdictions.

The LGCCA has charged the JWSAC with the task of developing a countywide sewer and water master plan (hereafter, "sewer and water master plan"). The County has supported this project through the contribution of staff and other resources. The County will encourage the use of this Comprehensive Plan in the development of the master plan.

The Board of Commissioners will adopt a sewer and water master plan and will consider adopting the JWSAC plan for such purpose. An adopted sewer and water master plan should bear the following characteristics:

- a) Address all facets of water and sewer policy and planning.
- b) Review and consolidate all previous planning efforts.
- c) Be countywide in scope, though focusing in depth on the county's urban core and existing utility service areas.
- d) Result in specific recommendations for future capital improvements and priorities to achieve desired community-wide objectives for water and sewer infrastructure and services.
- e) Identify appropriate funding mechanisms.

- f) Within a countywide sewer and water master plan, the following critical areas should be given high priority in the planning of future sewer extension projects:
1. The Urban Services Area as defined in the *Growth Management Strategy Element* of this Comprehensive Plan.
 2. Areas known to have significant concentrations of septic failure with particular attention to areas identified on Map # 21, *Urban Services Area with Septic Concern Areas...* (Appendix I).
 3. Public schools currently operating without sewer.
 4. Sites targeted for future school development by the long-range school facilities master plan as called for in Section 3, *Public Schools Element*.
 5. Areas targeted for industrial / economic development with particular attention to the vicinity of the Asheville Regional Airport and Industrial areas identified upon Map # 24, *Future Land Use Map* (Appendix I), Map # 08, *"Committee of 100" Recommended Industrial Development Zones* (Appendix I), and Map # 21, *Urban Services Area with Septic Concern Areas...* (Appendix I), as well as future areas identified by the *Industrial / Commercial Zoning Study* called for in Section 3, *Economic Development Element* or Community Plans called for in Section 04.
 6. Areas targeted for the development of commercial concentrations with particular attention to Community Service Centers identified upon Map # 24, *Future Land Use Map* (Appendix I) as well as future areas identified by the *Industrial / Commercial Zoning Study* called for in Section 3, *Economic Development Element* or Community Plans called for in Section 04.
 7. Areas targeted for intensive residential development.
- g) The sewer and water master plan will require regular updates in order to allow for a proactive, long-term capital improvement budget planning.

The sewer and water master plan should serve as an important guiding document in the development of Community Plans as envisioned in Section 4 of this Comprehensive Plan.

B. Formalize and solidify the role of the LGCCA Joint Sewer & Water Advisory Council.

The current sewer and water policy planning system exists within an environment devoid of a clear, formalized, coordinated planning and decision-making framework. This situation has received substantial attention over the years, and the solutions are not simple. However, recent developments are promising. For example, the formation of

the JWSAC provides a unique opportunity to explore more sophisticated inter-jurisdictional sewer and water planning relationships.

The role of the JWSAC is to craft a water and sewer strategy for the county. It is an important incremental step towards a more regional approach to water and sewer policy-making and planning. The County will adopt a measure recognizing the role of the JWSAC as an official advisory body to the Henderson County Board of Commissioners. The County will work to ensure that the WSAC represents all jurisdictions with interests in the county, including the City of Saluda and the Cane Creek Water and Sewer Advisory Board.

Over time, the County will combine the JWSAC and the Cane Creek Water and Sewer Advisory Board into a single entity, and formalize its role as the official advisory body for sewer and water issues countywide.

C. Consider forming an inter-local sewer and water agreement.

The County will explore opportunities to join with the municipal water and sewer service providers to create a countywide water and sewer cooperative by way of a long-term inter-local agreement among all local governments within Henderson County. The agreement would provide the framework for the consolidation – where appropriate – of water and sewer infrastructure and services planning, of capital investments in treatment facilities and principal infrastructure, and in the extension of services. This agreement would build upon the creation of the JWSAC.

D. Consider expanding the scope of the inter-local agreement to provide for the creation of a sewer and water joint management agency (JMA).

The JMA, a refinement of the inter-local agreement vehicle provided for in the N.C. General Statutes, allows for the establishment of an operational entity to manage and oversee multiple water and sewer programs where collective management is in the best interests of all parties. The JMA is a logical step forward in inter-local cooperation in instances where water and sewer authorities, sanitary districts, or other statutory options that involve the transfer of ownership are not acceptable or are premature. The JMA is an innovative device for improving planning, cooperation, and operational efficiencies. It will allow the existing organizations and infrastructure ownership to remain unchanged, while at the same time planning, operations, and management for participating systems are merged into a single program. In addition to facilitating a more regional approach to policy-making and planning, the JMA offers potential

savings, as it would consolidate the operations of all municipal and County utilities and engineering departments.

E. Integrate schools and sewer / water planning.

The sewer and water master plan and the long-range school facilities master plan (as recommended in Section 03, *Public Schools Element*) should be consistent with one another. The sewer and water master plan should be regularly updated to reflect the priorities of the long-range school facilities master plan, which should, in turn, reflect the recognize the realities of the sewer and water master plan.

F. Prioritize extensions to economic development sites.

Cooperate with the Greater Hendersonville Chamber of Commerce, AdvantageWest, and other economic development agencies to define priorities for water and sewer extension for economic development purposes. Such guidance should be reflected in the sewer and water master plan discussed above.

G. Establish and fund a 10-year capital improvement program and capital reserve fund which is adequate to implement planned investments in sewer and water infrastructure.

Such fund would require a permanent source of revenue. The appropriate level of capital investment should be based on the recommended Capital Improvement Program, which will derive its guidance from the sewer and water master plan.

Recommendation SW-02: Maintain existing policies and programs, and explore further measures, to protect and enhance the quality of public drinking water sources.

H. Continue to identify areas of septic failure and address these through existing remediation programs and through the countywide sewer and water master plan.

The County will work with the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources Waste Discharge Elimination program to identify and address incidences of septic system failure. The County will seek funding from the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund, EPA 319 fund, and other sources to fund this action. Additional measures to address this recommendation are discussed in the *Natural Resources Element* (Section 3) of this Comprehensive Plan.

I. Update the current sewer and water master plan to reflect service areas or create a sewer and water service area boundary plan.

The County should have an active role in determining the boundaries of service areas for sewer and water services. These service areas should define where the County plans to extend sewer and water services for the purpose of approving sewer and water extensions for proposed developments.

J. The County should study the feasibility of establishing public sewer service in the Etowah area and other areas in the County, especially those with private package plants, in light of the growth management strategy plan.

