ROANOKE
VIRGINIA

COMPREHENSIVE
PLAN

vision 2001/2020

Planning for Roanoke's future economic development, neighborhoods, and quality of life.

EXECUTIVE

SUMMARY

FOREWORD

vision 2001 2020

FOREWORD

Roanoke as a growing, dynamic, and sustainable city.
Vision 2001-2020 is a comprehensive plan that will guide investment and decision-making over the next 10 to 20 years. It is important to understand the overall vision and concepts that have guided the development of the plan's recommended policies and strategies.

1 **Roanoke's quality of life and economic development are integrally related.**
Retaining existing jobs and attracting new jobs are equally important factors in Roanoke's economic stability. Each relies not only on defining costs and benefits of doing business, but also on maintaining and selling the City and region as an attractive place to live and work.

Similarly, enhancing Roanoke's livability — its attractive quality of life, environment, neighborhoods, education, health, public services, and civic amenities — requires the continuing expansion of personal wages and public revenues to pay for these critical amenities.

2 **Roanoke is a city built using quality design principles.**
Beginning in 1907 with John Nolen's plan for *Remodeling Roanoke* and continuing to today, comprehensive plans have established the patterns of neighborhoods, business and commercial areas, parks, and open space. As recognized by the Nolen plan, considering the big picture for the City is important. A continued comprehensive emphasis on city design will improve Roanoke's attractiveness for new commercial and residential development and strengthen individual neighborhoods.

Future initiatives to promote quality city design should include the creation of new neighborhood design districts, landscape and transportation improvements to key corridors and intersections, and design guidelines for special economic development areas. Buildings and trees should shape the City's image rather than asphalt and signs.

3 **To implement the plan's policies, a series of strategic initiatives are identified.**
These initiatives include the following:

- **Targeted Industry Clusters.** As the regional economy shifts gears from a manufacturing base to a knowledge-based economy, marketing and development efforts should target industry clusters defined by existing regional assets and opportunities. An example of such a cluster is Roanoke's current biomedical initiative that builds on existing health care resources and higher education/institutional participation.

- **Getting Wired.** To accelerate the development of technological infrastructure, "getting wired" is a priority objective. Defining a regional relationship with Blacksburg and Virginia Tech will emphasize a complementary development environment for both entrepreneurial startups and established firms.

- **Redeveloping Underutilized Commercial and Industrial Sites.** To take advantage of its underutilized industrial and commercial land, the City should inventory industrial and commercial land and define opportunities for reuse based on market demand and innovative design potential, as well as on site size, location, accessibility, and infrastructure.

- **Village Centers.** As downtown continues to expand its traditional role as the region's business center, new or enhanced village centers can create attractive, smaller, decentralized multi-use development sites for commercial activity and higher-density housing.

- **Multi-Service Facilities.** To bring needed services closer to neighborhood users, the City can expand the outreach of public and not-for-profit programs for recreation, police, fire, neighborhood, library, and human services by creating a series of multi-service facilities at key locations.

- **New Housing Opportunities.** Identifying opportunities for new housing clusters — potential large site assemblies for development of new residential units — can provide opportunities for new housing more effectively than current approaches of single-lot infill development.

- **Investing in Critical Amenities.** The environmental, entertainment, and cultural elements of Roanoke's quality of life are critical amenities that must be financially supported if the region is to fulfill its economic development objectives. The larger community needs to define new methods to share the cost of maintaining and financing such attractions.

- **Selling Roanoke to Residents, Newcomers, and Visitors.** Roanoke is a well-kept secret within its own boundaries; residents are often not aware of existing amenities. An intense marketing effort must focus on both retaining local citizens, especially young people, and attracting outside companies, employees, and tourists to "Discover Roanoke" as a place to live, work, and play. Roanoke needs to develop a brand identity to be marketed aggressively at the local and global level.

- **Improving Streetscapes.** Roanoke's transportation framework has the most potential to affect the City's look and feel for residents and visitors. Creating great streets will improve both Roanoke's image and its function, providing not only a safe but also an attractive environment for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders, as well as for automobile drivers. Based on these values, new design principles should be developed and incorporated into new construction. Demonstration projects also should be pursued that enhance streets for community redevelopment.

- **Healthy Community.** Human services — education and libraries, health facilities, and social programs — are the basic infrastructure for a healthy community. A focus on high profile, positive programs will organize people-oriented services under a series of easily understandable umbrellas, communicating civic vision, attitude, and commitment. Such an approach can include combining early childhood learning, public schools, higher education, libraries, and continuing adult education into an integrated program for lifelong learning — or linking outreach programs for health and social services with information and referral networks, establishing the City of Roanoke as a healthy and sustainable community.

4 Roanoke is the heart of the region. The plan balances and links related elements and initiatives through a comprehensive regional and local development strategy:

- Regional linkages are identified that transcend municipal boundaries and relate Roanoke to the surrounding areas.
- Priority actions for new land use or public infrastructure initiatives are defined to reinforce multiple objectives.
- A variety of local project opportunities are identified to promote proactive, public-private development through the implementation of districts, gateway corridors, land use or zoning changes, and infrastructure improvements.

5 The continuing vitality and growth of Roanoke — like its development over the last 125 years — are dependent on individual and private actions, combined with public investment, to ensure quality of life amenities, infrastructure, and services.
In order to achieve the plan's challenging goals, a series of agreed upon implementation steps are critical:

- An ongoing evaluation process to regularly update the plan and its detailed components for housing, transportation, neighborhood and downtown plans, and other elements.
- Commitment by participants and private entities to be partners in implementing specific proposals.

- Administrative tools to implement the plan. Such tools may include updates to zoning and other regulatory ordinances, streamlined code compliance procedures, and links to City operating and capital budgeting procedures.

6 Roanoke's vision is to be a sustainable and livable community. Accomplishing this goal for the City and region implies establishing a permanent, continuing evaluation of economic and quality-of-life indicators — an ongoing report card of conditions and progress.

- Vision 2001-2020 provides the first step toward reaching this vision. The plan provides an inventory and evaluation of existing desirable strengths and assets, the quality of life amenities that citizen participants in the planning process hold most dear — keeping the soul.
- The plan establishes a broad model of what citizens want their community to be by recommending a comprehensive and balanced framework for preservation and development, an agenda for action, and a method of evaluation for achieving a sustainable community — imagining the future.

ROANOKE IN 2020: A VISION OF THE FUTURE

In the year 2020, Roanoke is a growing, dynamic, and sustainable city that is focused on the future with a strong, diverse economy and a balanced and growing population that values and enjoys a high quality of life in a safe and attractive environment. Working together, the City and region boast a steady growth in jobs and residents, higher school scores, improved government services, and a broader range of recreational and entertainment activities. Through regional cooperation, the mountain views and ridgetops are protected and are easily accessed by a network of greenways that link downtown, neighborhoods, and regional parks and parkways.

Roanoke's sustainability is measured not only by the health of its economy but also by its quality of life. Economic prosperity can be continued and enhanced by supporting our cultural and entertainment amenities, education, and other services. Protecting our natural environment, supporting a wide range of cultural and entertainment amenities, maintaining a first-class educational system, and providing ongoing educational opportunities will be the building blocks for attracting new residents and businesses.

The plan establishes a series of specific visions for the year 2020 to accomplish this overall goal:

Housing and Neighborhoods

Roanoke's neighborhoods are vibrant places for people of all ages, lifestyles, and income to live, work, and play. To achieve this vision:

- Roanoke will actively seek to attract a balanced, sustainable population representing all ages, income levels, backgrounds, and lifestyles.
- Roanoke's neighborhoods will be more than just places to live; they will be the nucleus for civic life. Their local "village centers" serve as vibrant and accessible places for business, community services, and activities, including higher-density housing clusters.
- Roanoke will offer a diversity of housing choices, including not only a range of housing prices but also housing types such as single-family houses, condominiums, multi-family high-rise and low-rise rental units, town homes, and patio homes. Suitable housing should be available in the neighborhood of one's choice for people at all stages of their lives, ranging from new homebuyers to empty nesters.

Environmental and Cultural Resources

Roanoke successfully markets itself and the region to residents and visitors as both an outdoors and an indoors destination — combining outstanding cultural and eco-tourism in one community. To achieve this vision:

- The Roanoke Valley Greenway system will be an interconnected network that not only serves City residents but also links downtown and village centers to City parks and recreation sites, the Roanoke River, and Mill Mountain. The system will be completed through enhanced regional cooperation with a "fast-track" implementation schedule. It will also become a regional resource, combining old rights-of-way, river and creek corridors, and various public lands and easements into a larger system of hiking trails, park features, fishing areas, rafting zones, and other natural features.

- Roanoke's clean air and water and greatly expanded greenways and tree cover will be assets that are recognized and supported by the whole community.

- Entertainment and cultural attractions will draw tourists and visitors who contribute to the City's liveliness. The City will be the regional center for multi-cultural events and attractions celebrating the diversity of the City and the region. The downtown will be a vibrant and dynamic destination that includes an exciting mix of restaurants, clubs, and night-spots to complement the art, museum, and theatre venues. This is in large part thanks to funding from additional sources and a regional asset district that will provide funds from consumer and private sources.

Economic Development

Roanoke is the strong center of a strong region, boasting a creative, diverse, sustainable economy. To achieve this vision:

- "New economy" opportunities will be regionally marketed and developed. The Roanoke Valley Economic Development Partnership will successfully market the region's assets to businesses in targeted industry groups such as biotechnology, optics, information technology/software, and transportation-related manufacturing and services.

- Roanoke's vibrant downtown will serve as the economic engine and cultural center for the region, enhanced by new activity centers through the designation of a technology zone and an expanded library and Higher Education Center.

- The Riverside Centre for Research and Technology, with the Carilion Biomedical Institute as its anchor, will serve as a successful prototype for similar biotechnology industry clusters in the future.

- Roanoke's brand identity will be known both locally and globally. Roanoke will be rated as one of the top tourist destinations for outdoors and family vacations. The Roanoke name will be associated with its healthy outdoors and adventure areas, combined with high-quality entertainment. The marketing strategy will be credited with increasing tourism and attracting several nationally known businesses to locate in the City. The influx of young professionals and families will boost the City's marketability to businesses that are seeking a quality lifestyle and a pool of talented, highly trained professionals.

- Roanoke's labor force will be well educated and trained for cutting-edge career opportunities that link industry with colleges and high schools.

- Underutilized industrial sites throughout the City will be targeted for intensive economic development and reuse.

Transportation and Infrastructure

In 2020, Roanoke's transportation system is an integrated multi-modal, user-friendly network of well-designed streets that support auto, transit, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic. To achieve this vision:

- Roanoke's transportation system will include an attractive and efficient network of roadways. Landscaped urban boulevards connecting neighborhoods and urban areas will be bordered by sidewalks, comfortable for bikers, and linked to greenways. Expressways will be carefully designed to carry traffic through, into, and out of the City with carefully minimized impact on surrounding neighborhoods. Local transit will connect higher-density centers of development — downtown and major employment centers along main roadway corridors — supported by a demand-driven system of buses and shuttles that serves areas of greatest access needs.

- Air traffic will link the region to major national destinations, and passenger rail service will have returned to the City, making possible short trips to Charlottesville, Richmond, Washington, and other points North and South.

- A framework of support infrastructure will set the stage for sustainable economic growth and quality development — not only the physical network of telecommunications, public utilities, and private energy networks, but also an associated program of available earmarked space, a trained workforce, and supportive government policies.

Public Safety and Services

The City delivers high-quality, effective services to maintain and enhance the City's safety, appearance, and environment. To achieve this vision:

- Roanoke will be known as a safe city where public services are professional, standardized, responsive, and community oriented. Public safety services will be provided equitably, efficiently, and effectively to citizens, regardless of jurisdiction.
- The City will have a multi-departmental approach to identifying and resolving a variety of community issues and strengthening the cooperative relationship among City departments, business and neighborhood organizations, and citizens. Multi-service facilities in key areas of the City will offer needed public services and programs at convenient and accessible locations.
- Solid waste management and recycling will be a model program with participation from all citizens in the City and in other jurisdictions.

People and Human Development

In 2020, all citizens have access to a first-rate educational system linked to skills-based training programs and to state-of-the-art health care to enhance and support a healthy and productive life. To achieve this vision:

- The City will promote lifelong learning for all citizens by encouraging the development of first-class academic and vocational institutions that recognize the changing global economy and diverse world in which we live.
- Roanoke's schools will be known for their enhanced education programs that ensure all children receive a quality education for entry into the workplace or participation in higher education.
- The library will be a state-of-the art information and research center. The new downtown library will receive national recognition as a model for the new role of libraries in the community as collections of information, knowledge centers, and community learning locations. The video conferencing center will enable small businesses and groups to actively participate in national and international programs; the coffee shop will be a favorite meeting place that regularly hosts programs ranging from authors' nights to Scrabble tournaments.
- The City's state-of-the-art health care and research facilities will continue to provide the highest quality health care for residents in the region. A community-based system will bring human and health services into neighborhoods to provide affordable, accessible health and human services that respond to needs and improve the quality of life for all citizens.
- New multi-service facilities in neighborhoods will include outreach space for public sector and non-profit human services programs and provide services to citizens where they are needed. These facilities will function as 12-month community centers for education, lifelong learning, information and referral, and recreation for people of all ages.

City Design

Finally, a unifying theme to implement Roanoke's vision of a sustainable and livable city is that of city design — increasing the beauty of Roanoke's gateways and streetscapes, neighborhood and housing developments, village commercial centers, and new economic development and institutional growth. To achieve this vision:

- Design improvements to major entry corridors into the City will enhance Roanoke's image and the visual appearance of the City.
- Design principles and guidelines will serve as marketing tools and provide desired models for new development by investors and landowners that encourage compatibility with existing neighborhoods. Village centers and areas for housing clusters will provide opportunities for new economic development initiatives.
- Similarly, new public facilities and buildings will be designed for quality appearance and multiple functions. Streets will have minimal pavement width, place greater emphasis on tree canopy and sidewalks, and include bicycle and pedestrian systems. Impacts of new development will be carefully mitigated through creative planning and design.

REMODELING ROANOKE

Roanoke's first comprehensive plan, *Remodeling Roanoke*, was completed in 1907 by famous landscape architect and planner John Nolen. Roanoke's plan was one of the first comprehensive plans in the nation. In 1997, Roanoke received a National Historic Landmark Planning Award from the American Institute of Certified Planners for this historic plan. Key recommendations of the plan included the grouping of municipal facilities, a river greenway, and street beautification standards.

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Vision 2001-2020 establishes a new direction for the City of Roanoke in terms of its housing, economic development, environment, historic and cultural resources, infrastructure, public services, quality of life, and city design. This plan gives us direction for the decisions we as a city must make over the next 10 to 20 years. The plan will allow us to build a better future, one that emphasizes a viable, sustainable community. The implementation of the strategic initiatives and actions of *Vision 2001-2020* will require partnerships between all sectors of the community. The public sector is important to the plan's implementation, but just as important are the support and initiatives of the neighborhood organizations, the non-profit sector, and the business and development communities. Certain initiatives will also require regional cooperation.

On behalf of the City of Roanoke, I would like to thank all the people who shared their thoughts, visions, hopes, and dreams for Roanoke during the development of this plan. Thanks to extensive public involvement, *Vision 2001-2020* defines a vision for Roanoke that is based on the goals and values expressed by our citizens. The more than 2,000 participants, including City staff who facilitated the process and shared their technical expertise as resource personnel for the citizens' committees, are to be commended for their dedication to the future of our city.

Ralph K. Smith, Mayor
City of Roanoke

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