



Forsyth County Voluntary Agricultural District Program and Agricultural Tourism Use Classification



The Voluntary Agricultural District is a tool that helps preserve farmland, open space, and rural character in the rural area of the County in accordance with the recommendations of *Legacy*, our comprehensive plan. The Forsyth County Commissioners adopted provisions for a Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) program in January 2008. By participating in the VAD program, landowners receive a set of benefits in exchange for restricting development on their land for a specific time period. Many of North Carolina's counties have passed Voluntary Agricultural District ordinances, and these districts have been a useful tool in protecting large tracts of land at a low cost to the public. Additionally, membership in a VAD is completely voluntary; only farmers who apply to be included may join.

Voluntary Agricultural Districts promote agricultural values as well as the agricultural community and its way of life. VADs also provide increased protection

from nuisance suits, encourage the economic and financial health of agriculture, allow for the deterrent of water and sewer assessments, and provide protection from non-farm development and other negative impacts on properly managed farms.

For a farm to be eligible for Forsyth County's Voluntary Agricultural District program, the farm must contain the minimum amount of land required for taxation based on farm use evaluation. This minimum amount would be five acres for farms with a horticultural use, ten acres for farms with an agricultural use, and twenty acres for farms used for forestry. A Voluntary Agricultural District may contain two or more qualifying farms located within one mile of each other. Farms must also participate in the present-use-value taxation program or be eligible to meet all qualifications of the program. There is no set amount of time farms must participate in the VAD program, and a farm may be withdrawn from the VAD program at

any time. For more information on the Forsyth County VAD program, contact the Forsyth Soil and Water Conservation District (336-767-0720).

The County Commissioners also adopted an agricultural tourism ordinance in February. Agricultural Tourism allows for certain recreational, educational, entertainment, or limited business activities operated in association with a bona-fide farm. Provisions for Agricultural Tourism are common in North Carolina, and Forsyth County is surrounded by counties that have already adopted such provisions, including Yadkin, Davie, Surry, and Guilford. Examples of activities allowed under Agricultural Tourism include wineries; educational farm tours and demonstrations; corn mazes; outdoor special events such as weddings; bed and breakfasts; and limited restaurant and retail uses.

In order to utilize the Agricultural Tourism use, a farm must be located in a VAD and must contain a minimum of twenty contiguous acres, exclusive of acreage containing the Agricultural Tourism use, in a single ownership. If a farm loses its VAD status, use of Agricultural Tourism Uses would be required to be discontinued.

Additionally, Agricultural Tourism would only be available for property zoned AG (Agricultural) or YR (Yadkin River) within the Rural Growth Management Area as designated in *Legacy*. Various use conditions are included in the Agricultural Tourism ordinance to help these uses fit into a primarily rural context.

Winston-Salem Adopts Pedestrian and Collector Street Plans

In November 2007, the Winston-Salem City Council adopted the *Collector Street Plan* and the *Sidewalk and Pedestrian Facility Plan*. Adoption of these plans enables full implementation of the new Street Standards Ordinance by identifying street types where sidewalks are required when new development occurs on existing streets.

The plans were adopted by the City-County Planning Board and by the Transportation Advisory Committee of the Winston-Salem Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in summer 2007. The plans cover the Winston-Salem MPO planning area which includes Forsyth County and portions of Davie, Davidson, and Stokes Counties. The plans were developed by staff from

the Winston-Salem Department of Transportation and the City-County Planning Board.

The purpose of the *Collector Street Plan* is to identify the existing collector street network and develop a system of future collect streets that promote connectivity by creating an efficient and balanced system for automobiles, transit, pedestrians, and bicycles. Collector streets gather traffic from the local residential or commercial street system and deliver it to the closest minor or major thoroughfare. Collector streets serve as an intermediate link in the transportation system providing important continuity and connectivity between local streets and thoroughfare roads. The *Collector Street Plan* will provide each municipality in the MPO with the mapping and technical information to encourage the construction of the collector street network as land development occurs.

The *Sidewalk and Pedestrian Facility Plan* was developed to support the integration of pedestrian planning into the long-range growth management and planning for the urban area. The "Ped Plan" provides jurisdictions with a guide for planning and constructing pedestrian facilities as well as connecting existing pedestrian facilities to other modes of transportation. The Ped Plan, along with the previously adopted *Greenway Plan, Winston-Salem and Forsyth County 2015* and the *Winston-Salem Urban Area Comprehensive Bicycle Master Plan*, will serve as the basis for creating a first class comprehensive, connected pedestrian and bicycle network throughout the planning area. To assure implementation of these plans, the MPO has hired former City-County Planning Board staff member, Lynda Schwan, to serve as the MPO's first Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator.



Want more information?

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