

- Open space is an essential part of good urban form.
- Open space provides a place for both recreation and preservation of natural features.
- There are many different sizes and types of open space that will enhance development and contribute to an excellent quality of life in the Places29 area.
- Planning for open space is an integral part of good urban design; it is not an afterthought.

## Open Space & Natural Resources

In order to focus development within the Development Areas, the Places29 Master Plan will promote a more densely developed urban form. Focusing development will lessen the pressure to develop the Rural Areas-where County residents have indicated they want to preserve the rural character. Historically, much of Albemarle County was an agricultural area, and there are still many fields, forests, and vistas that remind residents of that agrarian past.

In order for the Places29 area to attract the amount of development needed to serve our growing population, it must be appealing, functional, and offer a high quality of life. The Places29 Vision Statement, as endorsed by the Board of Supervisors, recognizes the importance of open space in urban development:



*Open space comes in many sizes, provides a sense of respite, and contributes to our area's excellent quality of life.*

### Save the date:

May 18th (Evening)

Introduction and Background Presentation

May 20th (9:00a.m.)

Small Group Session on Preferred Alternative

Public meetings will be held at Sutherland Middle School. Please visit

[www.albemarle.org](http://www.albemarle.org) for more information.

“...Integrated into this urban-style development, parks and open spaces will provide a sense of respite and contribute to an overall excellent quality of life.”

- *Places29 Vision Statement*

The County's Neighborhood Model directs that "Each Development Area will offer opportunities for public and private outdoor recreational areas for active and passive recreation." (page 4) The Model gives a more specific rationale for designating and designating open space:

“The Neighborhood Model proposes making open space integral to overall community design. This should result in residents having convenient access to parks, public gathering places, and natural views, whether they are at home, work, or play. The open space system should provide an important framework for the organization of development. It should serve as a connective element to join different development areas, in addition to preserving important aspects of the natural environment.”

- *The Neighborhood Model, page 15*

## Places29 Overview:

Places29 is an exciting community planning project that will help shape the future of northern Albemarle County communities. Places29 brings residents, business owners and others together to map out the best possible shared vision for this critical area. The project combines land use planning for four designated urban communities with the US 29 North Transportation Corridor Study.

Places29 Overview  
Transportation  
Transit & Transportation Operation Solutions  
Street Types  
Land Use & Urban Design  
Place Types  
**Open Space & Natural Resources**  
Economics  
Implementation

# OPEN SPACE & NATURAL RESOURCES

## What Is Open Space?

Open space comes in many forms, from large regional parks to small, neighborhood-scale "pocket" parks. It's intended for the full range of activities from passive to active and may run the gamut from very natural to formal in design. It fulfills the need for civic space where people can congregate, as well as the need to protect natural features, such as woodlands, stream valleys, floodplains, wetlands, and steep slopes. Some parks are owned by the County or other public agency, while some are owned by homeowners associations and are open only to residents of those developments.

Large parks, such as Chris Greene Lake Park and Ivy Creek Natural Area, are not located within the Places29 area - or even within the Development Areas-they are intended to serve all County residents. These large parks must be located where the natural features are, such as a lake, or where features are to be preserved, such as native habitat. Smaller parks are located throughout the Development Areas and within neighborhoods.

The Neighborhood Model defines several types of open space, including:

**The Greenway:** A corridor of open space that follows a natural feature, such as a stream valley, floodplain, or swale. It may also follow the path of an abandoned road or railroad bed. It usually contains a path for pedestrians and/or bicyclists.

**The Greenbelt:** A continuous area of open space at the edge of Development Areas... or communities. It is used to separate Development Areas from Rural Areas by providing a "hard green edge."

**Recreational Playing Field:** A public space dedicated to organized sports in a community, such as baseball, softball, soccer, football, and lacrosse. The size of the playing field depends on the sport.

**The Commons:** A public park of 2 to 5 acres that is clearly defined, possibly irregular in shape, and available for civic gatherings and unstructured recreation. A mix of residential, commercial, and civic buildings front all sides.

**The School Yard:** A public space generally associated with a school and usually under the control of the School Board. It is an open area specifically designed and equipped for larger scale recreation associated with schools, such as baseball, soccer, or football.

**The Square:** A public space usually no larger than one block at the intersection of significant thoroughfares that is used primarily for civic purposes. Buildings front it on all sides.

**The Green:** A defined open space within a neighborhood or block for unstructured recreation. Building facades surround it.

**The Plaza:** A public space that is generally less than half the size of a block located at the intersection of important thoroughfares. It is devoted to civic uses and commercial activity and is surrounded by buildings on all sides. It is often paved or partially paved.



*Well-designed urban places include public plazas, squares, and greens.*

## What Is Not Open Space?

Many parts of the Places29 area are not yet developed. These properties may be forested or fields that were once farmed, so that they now appear to be "open space." Often, the owners of these vacant properties are simply waiting for the right time to develop them. Residents who live nearby or drive past these properties are surprised when signs of imminent development appear; overnight it seems as if all the trees are cut down, the property is graded, and/or foundations poured. Or, it may simply be that a sign appears advertising a new neighborhood or indicating that the property is subject to a rezoning application.

People who live or work near undeveloped areas-or who are buying a home next to vacant property-may call the County's Community Development Department to find out the status of vacant property. County staff can determine what the land use designation is in the Comprehensive Plan, what the zoning is, and whether any plans have been submitted for County review. This information will indicate whether the vacant property is really open space or simply not yet developed.

# OPEN SPACE & NATURAL RESOURCES

## What Are Natural Resources?

The County's Comprehensive Plan identifies natural resources as "surface water and groundwater resources, biological resources, agricultural and forestry lands, critical slopes, mountains, the dark sky, wooded areas and other natural habitats, soils, air, and minerals." Many of these are found in the Places29 area and can be preserved through careful site planning of new developments. Other resources are found in the Rural Areas and will be less threatened if more development occurs in the Places29 area. And some resources, such as the dark sky, require careful development in all areas.

## The Planning Process: How Open Space Is Identified & Natural Resources Are Protected

At the beginning of the Places29 planning process, the consultants identified existing open space and natural resources. These were mapped and shown at the first public workshop in May 2005. During preparation of the Framework Map, additional areas will be identified. When the design guidelines are drafted, preferred locations for smaller open spaces in new developments will be identified and requirements for types of open space set out. These locations will include areas of steep slopes and stream valleys, for example, but will also include areas that can be used for more active recreation or for civic purposes. The objective is to identify the locations for open space at the same time locations are identified for homes, commercial uses, and the road network—open space should not be an afterthought.

It is the intent of staff and consultants that natural features be preserved wherever possible, but that open space will also include areas that can be used by the public. This desire to preserve natural features is tied to another important principle of the Neighborhood Model: site planning that respects terrain. This principle calls for "sensitivity to existing terrain through site design and architecture that fits into grades." (page 23)

During the rest of the Places29 planning process, the public is invited to indicate what natural features are important to them and what kinds of open space they would like.

In addition to the Vision Statement, the Board of Supervisors also endorsed a series of Guiding Principles for the Places29 Master Plan. These principles include three about "Open Space and Community Amenities" that indicate what participants in the process value:

1. The community values the expansive views of the Blue Ridge Mountains and other vistas; they add to the quality of life. They should be preserved through careful delineation and protection of viewsheds.
2. The Northern Development Areas community values a well-connected network of accessible public open spaces, greenways, and trails that will be created by preserving the existing open spaces and adding new ones, and making connections between open spaces in the Development Areas and surrounding Rural Areas and the City of Charlottesville.
3. The County's public facilities, such as libraries and schools, are both a source of pride and a resource. These facilities should be convenient and accessible to neighborhoods and employment centers.



*Focusing growth within development areas and preserving rural areas creates clear edges.*

## For More Information:

### [Albemarle County](#)

[www.albemarle.org](http://www.albemarle.org)

Judith Wiegand, Senior Planner

[jwiegand@albemarle.org](mailto:jwiegand@albemarle.org)

401 McIntire Road

Charlottesville, VA 22902

(434) 296-5832 x3438

### [Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission](#)

[www.tjpd.com](http://www.tjpd.com)

Harrison Rue, Executive Director

[hrue@tjpd.com](mailto:hrue@tjpd.com)

401 East Water Street

Charlottesville, Virginia 22901

(434) 979-7310

**Places29 is a joint project of Albemarle County, the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPD) and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), with the assistance of an experienced consulting team.**