

Relevant Comprehensive Plan Sections

[Chapter 7 of the Albemarle County Comprehensive Plan](#) adopted June 10, 2015 provides Albemarle County's vision and objectives for the Rural Areas.

Objective 1 (pictured below) provides that we need to support a strong agricultural and forestal economy.

Objective 1: Support a strong agricultural and forestal economy.

Agriculture and forestry are two important and long-standing land uses in the County's Rural Area, although characteristics of both industries have changed over time. Tobacco was an important crop in the Colonial era, but soon led to soil depletion. Fruit and orchard production have been and continue to be features of Albemarle's agricultural production, with grape-growing and winemaking becoming more important. Beef cattle production, dairy farming, and raising of grains and grasses to support these animals are prominent activities. Managed forests and timber harvests continue to be important.

Horse farming and equestrian activities are another longstanding agricultural use in Albemarle County. Horse farming is a term inclusive of any or all of the activities of horse breeding, boarding, training, and riding lessons.

Agricultural and Forest Soils

As indicated in Objective 1, retaining continuous land holdings for agricultural uses is of prime importance because of the soil attributes of the land. Many soils in the Rural Area are especially suitable for agricultural and forestal uses, such as crop and timber production. In Albemarle County, there are three major categories of soils for agriculture that have been identified by the Natural Resources Conservation Service:

- Prime farmlands (suitable for cultivated crops and alfalfa hay in Albemarle);
- Locally important farmlands (suitable for alfalfa, mixed hay, and pasture in Albemarle); and
- Unique farmlands (suitable for orchards and vineyards in Albemarle).

The individual soil types included in these groups can be found at the link provided [Reference Documents](#). The Natural Resource Conservation Service has also defined the following high quality silvicultural (forest) productivity classes:

- Hardwoods I (suitable for commercial production of Northern Red Oak, White Oak, Black Oak, Yellow Poplar, and Ash);

Livability Project

Charlottesville and Albemarle County will continue to promote a community of green neighborhoods, healthy waterways, clean air, and sustainable natural resources.

To do this, the County should:

- *Improve the viability of local agriculture by: concentrating development in those areas of the City identified for greater intensity of use and higher densities and in the County Development Areas;*
- *Strengthen measures that protect agriculture in the Rural Area;*
- *Recognize the shared interests between the City and County in promoting a strong local food economy; and*
- *Maintain the distinct character of the Rural Area.*

Strategy 1J (pictured below) under Objective 1 provides that we should consider amending the Zoning Ordinance to allow landscape services and storage of landscape materials in the Rural Area.

Strategy 1j: Consider amending the Zoning Ordinance to allow landscape services and storage of landscape materials in the Rural Area.

Nursery production that does not have a retail component is considered a Rural Area use because trees and shrubs require room to grow. Growing trees and shrubs is supportive of an agricultural and forestal economy. However, a service occupation related to landscaping with trees and shrubs is currently considered a Development Areas use. In the Zoning Ordinance, storage of landscape materials represents a contractor's storage yard and not allowed in the Rural Area Zoning District. In recent years, discussion has taken place on whether storage yards for landscape materials are more appropriate in the Rural Area than the Development Areas due to the large outdoor storage component of material and equipment. As part of the zoning text amendments being considered for the Rural Area, this issue should be discussed and clarified. Outdoor storage of landscape materials may be appropriate for the Rural Area, as many features are similar to other Rural Area uses.

Further, the Comprehensive Plan provides specific criteria (pictured below) for review of new uses.

Criteria for Review of New Uses

As new uses are proposed in the Rural Area, it is essential that they be able to meet the following standards. New uses should:

- relate directly to the Rural Area and need a Rural Area location in order to be successful, (e.g., a farm winery has to be located in the Rural Area and would be unlikely to succeed in the Development Areas);
- be compatible with, and have a negligible impact, on natural, cultural, and historic resources;
- not conflict with nearby agricultural and forestal uses;
- reflect a size and scale that complements the character of the area in which they will be located;
- be reversible so that the land can easily return to farming, forestry, conservation, or other preferred rural uses;
- be suitable for existing rural roads and result in little discernible difference in traffic patterns;
- generate little demand for fire and rescue and police service;
- be able to operate without the need for public water and sewer;
- be sustainable with available groundwater; and
- be consistent with other Rural Area policies.

Most importantly, the success of the use should be related to its rural location. For example, a farm winery where most of the grapes are grown onsite is a Rural Area use. A standalone wine store that sells wines from all over the world is a commercial use that belongs in the Development Areas. A department store distribution center located near an interstate interchange should be in the Development Areas, but a storage and distribution facility for locally produced agricultural products could be located in the Rural Area.

Performance standards will be needed for any new uses to ensure that the size, scale, and location of the new commercial uses recommended for the Rural Area are appropriate. It is of prime importance that the appearance and function of new uses blend and not detract from the key features of the Rural Area. New uses should not overwhelm an area in terms of their function or visibility.