

CHAPTER 8

DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

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Development in Charles City County is influenced by many factors. Some of these, such as regional growth trends or local soil conditions, are beyond the control of the county. The county can influence other factors, such as the future development pattern.

One purpose of this section is to briefly examine regional and county growth trends. The other purpose is to examine those assets that make the county a desirable place to live and work as well as those factors that limit or constrain development.

During the spring of 2007, the planning commission conducted a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis to identify growth issues facing the county. A copy of the analysis is included in **Appendix A**. These issues are discussed below within Development Assets and Constraints.

GROWTH TRENDS IN THE RICHMOND REGION

The Richmond region as a whole is experiencing a steady increase in population, housing units, and employment. According to data from the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission (RRPDC), the population in the Richmond region (PDC) increased from 865,941 persons in 2000 to 1,002,696 in 2010. This represents a 15.79 percent increase, 2.77 percent more than the State's growth rate of 13.02 percent. Population forecasters anticipate continued growth in the region into the next century.

Housing stock in the region has grown faster than the population. Between 2000 and 2008, housing units increased from 356,917 to 412,623 units, a 16 percent increase. Residential development has flourished in the northern, western and southern portions of the region. Recently development has begun to occur in the eastern portion of the region.

In 2000, there were 2,895 housing units in Charles City County. The number of housing units increased to 3,141 in 2008, which is an 8 percent increase. This increase is a significant contrast to the 16 percent increase in regional housing stock over the same period even when considering the slight decrease in household size.

The number of jobs in the region has also grown. Non-agricultural employment in the region increased from 570,200 in April 2001 to 601,783 in March 2013, according to the Virginia Economic Commission. This represents an increase of 5.2% percent

CHAPTER 8 – DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

Two comments can be made about growth in the region. First, growth has not been even across the region. Some localities are growing by leaps and bounds; others are growing very slowly, if at all. Second, there is a price to pay for rapid growth. Some local governments are having difficulty keeping up with demands from new residents. Local budgets are insufficient to provide necessary schools and other services. **Map 18** shows the changes in impervious surface based on the amount of structures from 1994 to 2002.

CHARLES CITY COUNTY GROWTH TRENDS

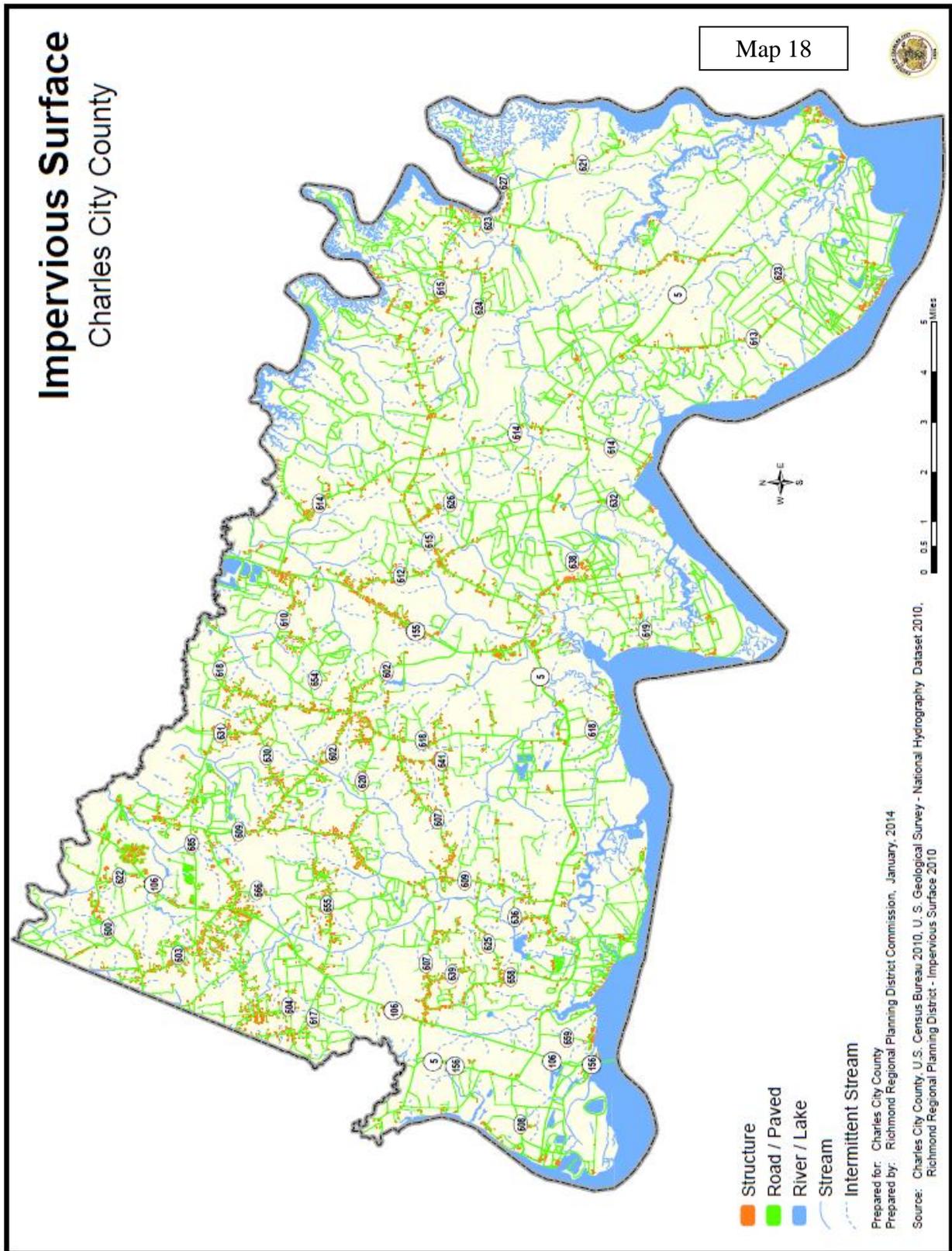
The county population changed slightly from 2000 to 2010. In 2000, 6,926 persons lived in the county. The population grew to 7,256 persons in 2010. This growth in population represents an increase of 5 percent for the ten year period. While the county's population increased, the Richmond Region and Virginia grew by 15 percent and 13 percent, respectively for that period.

From 2010 to 2020, the region and the state are expected to grow by 14.81 percent and 10.13 percent, respectively according to estimates by the Virginia Economic Commission (VEC). The county's population is expected to increase by 7.65 percent between 2010 and 2020, almost half of the projected growth rate for the region and 75 percent of the projected rate for the state

The projected growth rates for the county may be good news. Future growth may not be as rapid as projected for the region, but is in keeping with past county trends. This means that while growth is occurring, it may be more manageable than growth being experienced in other localities in the region.

DEVELOPMENT ASSETS

The county is fortunate to contain a variety of assets which contribute to the quality of life. Residents are able to enjoy what is essentially a rural life-style and still have the benefits of two urban areas close at hand. Of particular importance are the below items that are believed to have greater significance to the future of land use growth in the county.



CHAPTER 8 – DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

1. COMMUNITIES/RURAL CHARACTER OF THE COUNTY: The first feature visitors notice is the relatively unspoiled beauty of the county. Deep forests, agricultural fields and open space are the predominant land uses. The rural character of the county is more than just the natural beauty, however. County residents are proud of their close knit communities where several generations have lived and raised families. There is a feeling of safety in the county and of being away from the hustle and bustle of urban life. Maintaining this aspect of county life is just as important today as it was in 1979 when the county adopted the goal of preserving the rural nature as part of the Comprehensive Plan.

2. LOCATION BETWEEN RICHMOND AND WILLIAMSBURG/JAMES CITY COUNTY: The county's location between two growing urban areas offers a variety of employment, shopping and recreational opportunities that are not found in rural areas. In contrast, Charles City County has the inherent ability to attract visitors who need a break from urban forms and come and take advantage of county's rural nature.

The county's location is a mixed blessing, however. The growth currently experienced in surrounding localities may one day reach the county line. The population of New Kent County to the North is expected to grow between 2010 and 2020 by 14.12%. Residential and commercial development is occurring in Henrico County to the west and a commercial development of 65,000 square feet opened there in 2008. A recent residential community in James City County to the east brings large scale development to within a few miles of the Charles City County line. Fort Lee's expansion to the south brings vast military employment, support services, housing and K-12 education needs.

As land adjacent to the county is developed, investors will begin to look more closely at the county. Therefore, Charles City must begin now to assure that future development enhances the quality of life which county residents now enjoy.

3. TOURISM: Tourism is definitely an important part of this region's economy. According to the 2007 Virginia Outdoors Plan, tourism spending in Virginia reached a new high in 2005 of \$16.5 billion, which is a 9.6 percent increase over the 2004 figure of \$15 billion. Recreational opportunities range from historic sites to theme parks. Travel and interest in historic places is a major contributor to the region's economy.

Tourist trade from Colonial Williamsburg and Richmond adds to the number of travelers passing through Charles City County. These travelers often stop to explore the historic resources the county has to offer. Several historic sites are open to the public, which also contain unique gift shops. Several bed and breakfast operations are located in historic structures.

CHAPTER 8 – DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

4. PRIME AGRICULTURAL AND FOREST LAND: The county contains thousands of acres of land that is well suited for farming and silvicultural use. In fact, over one-third of the soils in the county are classified prime agricultural, the very best soils by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The preservation of agricultural and forest lands is a high priority because of the importance of these lands to the local economy. Preservation of these resources is also important to maintaining the quiet character of the county.

5. LARGE, UNDEVELOPED TRACTS: A large portion of the undeveloped land in the county exists in large tracts under single ownership. This is especially true along the James River. Generally such tracts outside of Development Centers and Neighborhood Service Areas would not be developed. The county is taking action to ensure these tracts, if developed, are intentionally master planned in a comprehensive and professionally responsive manner sensitive to the quality of life requirements of the citizens of Charles City County.

6. ROUTE 5 CORRIDOR: Route 5 has been designated a Scenic By-way by the Commonwealth. According to the Virginia Department of Transportation, the purpose of the By-way program is to identify outstanding road segments and to conserve them for the enjoyment of Virginians and out-of state tourists.

The Route 5 corridor is important to county residents for several reasons. The tree lined corridor is a symbol of the quiet, undisturbed character of the county. In addition, Route 5 links together several historic sites, either directly or by access to other county roads. The Commonwealth of Virginia is building a Capital to Capital bikeway within the right-of-way of Route 5. The use of the bikeway will attract businesses needed to support tourists transiting the county by bicycle.

Route 5 also serves another purpose. It is the only east-west road that runs the entire length of the county. A variety of users travel Route 5 including through trucks, local traffic, and tourist. While capacity of the road to carry traffic is not a problem at this time, the limited pavement width combined with the variety of users can create safety concerns.

Future development plans for the county should incorporate measures to protect the natural beauty of the Route 5 corridor, and other principal entrances to the county. The county should also work closely with the Department of Transportation to ensure safety on Route 5.

7. EXTENSIVE RIVER FRONTAGE: The county contains many miles of river frontage. To date, development along the James and Chickahominy rivers has been limited.

CHAPTER 8 – DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

A portion of the James River from approximately Trees Point eastward into James City County is designated a state historic river. This designation was based on the superior natural beauty of the area and done in order to maintain the historic, scenic and ecological values of this portion of the river.

A major factor that could change the relative serenity of the rivers is the demand for river front property. This type of property is always in demand for retirement and second homes, marinas and other water oriented activities. Any development along the rivers must be done in a manner that compliments the natural beauty of the area. Furthermore, regulations implementing the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act require the county to regulate development along all rivers and streams.

8. REGIONAL LANDFILL: Charles City County opened a state of the art landfill in 1990. This landfill, operated by Waste Management of Virginia, Inc. substantially increased the county's revenues in the early 1990s providing funds for new schools and other public facilities. The current economic climate however has reduced landfill revenues while still providing a needed service. The revenue the landfill generates is a dependable stream of income to the county

9. RICE INSTITUTE/CONSERVATION AREAS: The Chickahominy Wildlife Management Area, located in the eastern portion of the county, provides the public with opportunities to hunt, fish, hike, or just enjoy the outdoors. The Kittiewan Wildlife Management Area, located at the south end of Route 619, offers an opportunity to observe wildlife in an unspoiled setting. Both areas insure that a part of the county will always retain its undeveloped character. These areas also add to the number of persons who visit the county each year.

The Virginia Commonwealth University has established a 342 acre preserve and educational facility between Route 5 and the James River for training not only VCU students but also local school students and citizens in the principles of environmental science. The District Office of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is housed on the VCU preserve.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service maintain a fish hatchery on Harrison Lake which provides passive recreational opportunities such as fishing, bird watching and hiking for county citizens and guests.

Additional lands are set aside by private individuals in perpetual easement, never to be developed as urban land uses. According to Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) records there are 1,225.89 acres under such easements within Charles City County.

CHAPTER 8 – DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

10. HERITAGE RESOURCES: The county is a treasure chest of historic and archeological resources. These resources document the contribution of all population groups that have contributed to the making of present day Charles City County.

The continued existence of these resources is due in part to the limited development that has occurred. Future development must be done in a manner that respects and preserves these valuable assets.

The Comprehensive Plan of 1998 noted the link between the county's historic resources and the local economy. The county works with private land owners to protect these valuable resources from incompatible development.

11. INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION: The county has a great opportunity to expand its industrial base. While the existing Roxbury Industrial Park on Rt. 106 is reaching full capacity, there continues to be prospective industrial interests. This continued interest level indicates that there may be a need for an additional industrial park within the county.

The county has many assets which make it an ideal location for industrial uses. The county's large contiguous tracts along Rt. 106 make it highly marketable as prospective clients look at the time and cost savings associated with not having to compile the desired amount of land for industrial uses. In addition, the Rt. 106 corridor is within close proximity to Interstate 64 as well as Rt. 60 and Rt. 10, as well as the port facility near Shirley Plantation, Port Tobacco at Weanack.

Recently, the Virginia Port Authority requested a listing of large tracts in the county with access to Rt. 106 and the Port Tobacco facility for inquiries from marine-dependent industries. The market for developable large tracts with waterfront or near-water access in the Hampton Roads area is limited by a low number of sites available and by congestion of infrastructure and daily transportation capacity.

The 64 Express Project (a tug and container barge service) provides a growing alternative to traditional trucking. The 64 Express Project offers a cost effective, environmentally friendly, congestion relieving alternative to truck freight shipments to and from the Hampton Roads. James River Barge Line, LLC initiated the container-on-barge service in late 2008 and currently operates twice a week between the Port of Richmond and the Port of Hampton Roads but expects to make three trips a week in the immediate future and continue the growth over time. The 64 Express along the James River passes by Port Tobacco near Shirley Plantation and the Rt. 106 Industrial Development Corridor.

CHAPTER 8 – DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

12. SAND AND GRAVEL DEPOSITS: Large deposits of sand and gravel are found in the county. Areas with the potential for sand and gravel production cover much of the area between the John Tyler Memorial Highway (Route 5) and the James River as well as land adjacent to the Chickahominy River. Mining sites along the James River are especially valuable due to access to river transportation.

Sand and gravel mining operations can create problems if operated without regard to surrounding land uses. Truck traffic can interfere with other highway users. Mining operations can also create noise and dust problems, disturbing the highly prized serenity of rural living.

To date, mining has not been a major contributor to the local economy. Any decision to permit sand and gravel mining must consider the potential impacts on the area as well as the need to mine this valuable product.

CONSTRAINTS

There are factors which limit or constrain development in the county. Some of these constraints, such as the availability of public water and sewer utilities, can be eliminated or reduced over time. Other constraints, such as soil conditions, will always be present. Of particular importance are those items discussed that are believed to have greater significance to the future of land use growth in the county.

1. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT: The natural environment that makes Charles City County the beautiful place it is also impacts land use development potential. Of significance is the prevalence of poor soil for on site septic treatment throughout the county. These poor soils not only limit the ability of new homes to be built, but are most often the cause of failed septic systems that are too costly to repair.

In addition, some of the natural features found in the county are extremely sensitive to development. An example of the most sensitive areas is wetlands. Wetlands serve a variety of functions including reabsorbing and filtering water, and providing necessary wildlife habitat that is an important quality of life indicator for rural residents. Other natural features, such as steep slopes and floodplains, are less sensitive to development but require special engineering considerations that increase development cost.

The county's natural environment is an important quality of life indicator that should not be overcome by inappropriate and/or insensitive development. The county should continue to protect the natural environment through enforcement of environmental regulations, and good site design. Development that is not sensitive to the environment can threaten the county's water supply, increase the likelihood of

CHAPTER 8 – DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

flooding, lead to the deterioration of the rural environment so important to county residents.

Undeveloped lands in the county, including farms and forest contribute to the environmental health and add to the county's high quality of life. Preservation of and investment into healthy farms and forestry is a valued investment of the county's rural character and quality of life.

2. LACK OF PUBLIC WATER AND SEWER SERVICE: The county's residents have relied primarily on groundwater to provide their potable water needs; however, the continued withdrawal of groundwater has caused a lowering of water levels throughout the aquifer system creating problems for existing shallow wells and raising concerns about the long-term viability of groundwater as a dependable, safe source of water. Poor soils throughout the county also create the need for public sewer systems. According to a recent analysis of generalized soil characteristic, 67.5 percent of the soils in the county are unsuitable for on-site sewage treatment systems. This is based on current Virginia Department of Health standards.

The 1979 comprehensive plan stated that the county's top goal was to improve the standard of living for its residents. Associated with this goal was the objective of providing water and sewer utilities. Unless efforts are made to provide comprehensive water and sewer services in designated growth areas of the county, future land uses will continue to be limited (primarily residential), scattered where adequate soils for on site septic can be found, and low density (large lots of a minimum of one acre). This type of development will continue to consume rural land and limit the diversity and choices of housing types, and commercial and industrial growth.

3. LIMITED TELECOMMUNICATIONS: Affordable high speed internet is critical to attracting the valuable industrial and commercial uses to the county. High speed internet is available in very limited areas of the county.

Commercial internet providers need a certain number of customers to generate a profit large enough to justify bringing internet services to a locale - considerations of both the costs of installation and continued maintenance of high speed internet. Providing each county resident an opportunity to have high speed internet service is a priority of the County Supervisors.

4. LIMITED HIGHWAY SYSTEM: The county is somewhat removed from the major transportation corridors in the region. Interstate Route 64 and U.S. Route 60 pass near, but not through the county. State Route 5 is the only major east-west road in the county. North-south access is somewhat better with two primary routes, State

CHAPTER 8 – DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

Routes 106 and 155. The lack of alternatives for east-west travel could lead to a change in character of the Route 5 corridor. This is especially true if large scale development occurs in the southern part of the county. The construction of alternative east-west roads incorporating existing secondary routes could help maintain the Route 5 corridor as it is now. Alternatively, improvements could be made to Route 5 that maintain the parkway appearance of the road. Portions of Route 60 in New Kent County could serve as a model should widening of Route 5 become necessary. Any such activity should include roads built with the assistance of developers contributing to the traffic increase. This same technique could be used to improve internal circulation within the county.

All other roads in the county are secondary and some are narrow and twisting. A trip through the interior of the county may require switching from one road to another. The traffic limitations on these roads prohibit extensive development in the more rural areas of Charles City County.

5. LIMITED RENTAL OR MULTI-FAMILY DEVELOPMENT: Housing opportunities in the county are limited primarily to owner-occupied, single family houses on lots of one to five acres in size. Multi-family housing is virtually unavailable. This situation is due in part to the lack of public utilities coupled with poor soil conditions. The net result is that young families starting out or older residents wanting to forego the upkeep of a large residence have few alternatives available within the county.

The desire to reduce housing costs is shown by the trend toward the use of manufactured housing (mobile homes) in the county. Over 50 percent of the single family residences added in the county between 1980 and 1989 were mobile homes. Manufactured homes are usually viewed as a less expensive alternative to conventional, stick-built housing.

The county also recognizes that multi-family development will require some form of public or community utilities. This will be expensive. The alternative, however, is to continue the existing scattered development pattern. This course will only delay the installation of utilities while allowing more land to be converted to urban uses. This course may also lead to the loss of some residents due to the limited housing opportunities available.

6. LIMITED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES: Employment opportunities are limited in the county. According to the Virginia Employment Commission data, Charles City County's total civilian labor force at the end of 2012 was 3,843 persons with 297 of those unemployed. This was an approximate 8 percent average unemployment rate in 2012.

Due to the economic decline occurring in the latter part of 2008, these numbers have changed significantly. In February of 2009, the unemployment rate had almost

CHAPTER 8 – DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

double the 2008 average of 5 percent, placing the county's unemployment rate at 9.6 percent

Of that total labor force, 2,285 individuals commuted out of the county for work. While this may not be unusual in a rural area, it may have long term negative impacts on the county – a relative brain drain effect. High school and college graduates that cannot find employment in the county tend to leave to live near their jobs, buy their groceries and shop outside of the county – further draining the county economically and also not reinvesting in future economic growth. As the young population leaves, the attractiveness of Charles City County as a business location is further reduced.

The loss of the younger population affects the citizen quality of life also in that the demand for commercial recreational activities such as movies, and bowling can not be supported.

7. LIMITED COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT: The county has very little commercial development. This impacts residents in many ways. First, residents purchase most goods and services outside the county, stripping the county of essential tax revenues. In addition, county residents lose potential employment opportunities offered by commercial development.

As the population grows, commercial development should increase. However, the continuation of a scattered development pattern hinder the concentration of population that is necessary to attract certain types of commercial activities. In addition, scattered residential development contributes to scattered commercial development and the further loss of open space.

8. LIMITED ECONOMIC BASE: Industrial and commercial developments are usually prime contributors to a local tax base. The lack of a strong industrial and commercial base has a profound impact on the county and its residents. Without industrial and commercial components to contribute to the local tax base, the county is forced to rely on other sectors for revenues. This means that other types of development must either shoulder a larger than average portion of the tax bill or the county must go without some services.

CONCLUSION

After reviewing the development assets and constraints within the county, one can begin to understand the need to formulate a plan for guiding future development. This plan must seek to take advantage of the county's assets and work with, or overcome, the constraints.

CHAPTER 8 – DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT
