Chapter 5: Land Use

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Background

Planning for the usage of land is the core concept of community planning and is the basis for all of the other sections of this plan. When a town has a vision for the future use of the land, it becomes important to create guidelines for development. Any other plans should work on installing the necessary physical, legal, and administrative infrastructure to ensure development follows the land use plan.

Much of the process in planning for land development is in determining the best manner of accommodating the town’s anticipated growth. As identified in Chapter Four (Demographics), Beech Mountain anticipates at least some growth in the coming years. The decisions made in regard to land usage can encourage, dissuade, guide, or control growth and development. The vision for the future of Beech Mountain identified that the Town wants to encourage growth when it is reasonable, in order to invigorate the economy and meet community needs. However, the town also wants to ensure that it protects its natural environment and does not destroy the characteristics that draw people to the mountain. It will be important for Beech Mountain to find the right balance between these two ideologies to become the town that it wants to be.

To accommodate the future residents and property owners of Beech Mountain, it is important to understand their choices and preferences with regard to land usage. A recent report by the Urban Land Institute identified that communities like Beech Mountain are desirable precisely because they provide such a refuge and a counterpoint to the urban environments in which an increasing percentage of our nation’s population live. It is reasonable to assume that just as more and more people decide to make their primary residence in an urban setting, there will be a reciprocal trend towards refuges in second homes and vacation areas with large open areas, plenty of space, and a rural atmosphere. Our land use practices should be tailored to fit these forecasted demands.

But altering land use policies in Beech Mountain is not an easy task given its pre-existing ownership patterns and cadastral layout. Beech Mountain is comprised of over 5,000 subdivided lots. These lots, being generally one third to one half acre in size, are neither ideal for compact development that preserves open space nor large enough to foster a true low-density rural land use pattern. Though many of these lots are vacant and unused, their owners nevertheless hold varying expectations about their potential. Some entertain hopes of one day building their dream home in the mountains, while others hold the land for other purposes (such as Beech Mountain Club membership) and would gladly see it dedicated to better use if their purposes were otherwise achieved. Working with landowners of vacant lots and incentivizing conservation is key to preservation of our open space.
SEE APPENDIX FOR FULL SIZE MAP
Land Use: Goals and Objectives

Goal LU.G1: Encourage Land Use that Maintains the Quaint Mountain-Town Feel of Beech Mountain

In the Comprehensive Planning Survey, stakeholders clearly expressed that the laid-back pace of the community and the natural surroundings are of utmost importance to life on Beech Mountain. It will be a major goal throughout this plan to preserve the small-town character of Beech Mountain. Our land use patterns have a major influence on the way of life in Beech Mountain.

Policy LU.G1.P1: Follow Smart Growth Principles

It is a goal of the Beech Mountain community to ensure that growth we experience is well thought-out, well located, and appropriate for Beech Mountain. The land use plan should accommodate growth while also preserving the natural beauty and resources that make Beech Mountain unique. By following Smart Growth principles, Beech Mountain can develop a plan to make it possible to continue development, maintain the character of the town, and strengthen the community.

Strategy LU.G1.S1: Develop Smart Growth Strategies for Beech Mountain:

- Consider infill development options to focus new development toward the established commercial centers along Beech Mountain Parkway.
- Encourage redevelopment and renewal of dilapidated properties as an alternative to new construction.
- New commercial and residential developments should utilize construction practices such as LEED that minimize harm to the environment.
- Develop an attractive town center that is host to a variety of shops, restaurants, and businesses, encouraging development in the core of town, rather than on the periphery.
- Allow for mixed use residential and commercial development in commercial zone.

Smart Growth Principles
As promoted by the Smart Growth Network:

1. mix land uses.
2. take advantage of compact building design.
3. create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
4. create walkable communities.
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
6. preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
7. strengthen and direct development towards existing communities.
8. provide a variety of transportation choices.
9. make development decisions fair, predictable, and cost effective.
10. encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.
Strategy LU.G1.S2: Continue to update the Permitted Use Table in the zoning ordinance
   It is important that the Permitted Use Table be forward thinking and identify and set standards for emerging land usages before they occupy land.

Strategy LU.G1.S3: Revise and improve the Town’s subdivision regulations
   Although the vast majority of Beech Mountain was subdivided into residential lots prior to its incorporation as a Town, there are still a precious few large undeveloped tracts within its boundaries. The town needs to ensure that if these areas are subdivided, they are done so only in a way that is beneficial to the community. Beech Mountain already has plenty of vacant, buildable lots. If a new area is to be subdivided it should, it should be held to the highest standards of quality, and ideally should provide amenities and facilities that are not already present. The Town’s subdivision ordinance should be reconsidered with this in mind, considering the possible inclusion of requirements for open space, trails, and recreation amenities.

Goal LU.G2: Conserve Beech Mountain’s Natural Resources and Open Space
Beech Mountain is home to majestic views, clean air, and large tracts of open land that surround its residential neighborhoods. The beautiful natural surroundings are an important aspect of life for residents and help draw visitors to the area. These natural resources define our community, and their preservation is a top priority when considering future land use.

Policy LU.G2.P1: New development will continue to be built in a manner that respects natural resources and wildlife habitat.
   Beech Mountain’s land use code contains ordinances that regulate the construction practices and site location of new development; these ordinances ensure builders follow best management practices around environmentally sensitive areas.
   Effective Ordinances include:
   •  **Watershed Buffers** – 30-foot buffer along banks of perennial water courses
   •  **Water Supply Watershed Management** -- limits land cover in high quality water supply areas
   •  **Soil Erosion and Sediment Regulations** – sets a standard for management of erosion during and after construction
   •  **Tree Regulations** – limits the removal of trees from private and public property within the Town
   •  **Subdivision Ordinance** – limits minimum lot size and other requirements for new lots.
Strategy LU.G2.S1: Continually improve ordinances that govern construction and development regulation.
In order to properly regulate development and construction, any town needs a clear and concise set of ordinances. Revising sections of the ordinance code will help strengthen their meaning, clarify vagueness, and prevent violations due to misunderstanding or contradiction.

The town will create a new land use map based on current zoning and lot layout. Land conservation is vital to the local environment but also provides amenities for residents and supports the tourism industry on which much of Beech Mountain relies. The creation of a new land use map will highlight areas where development is appropriate and integrate conservation areas where appropriate.

Strategy LU.G2.S2: Prioritize land parcels for conservation
In order to effectively conserve land, the town will first create a plan that targets lots that are most appropriate for conservation. High priority parcels will include but are not limited to: environmentally sensitive areas, lots along trails, unbuildable lots, lots without utilities and clusters of vacant lots.

Policy LU.G2.P3: The Town will encourage private-funded land conservation by local residents.
Conservation of Beech Mountain’s land is not relegated to public endeavors only. Private citizens can make huge strides towards preserving the Mountains natural areas as well, and there are various ways that the Town can help encourage them. One method could be through neighborhood cluster workshops encouraged or hosted by the Town that could gather neighborhood support and local buying power to purchase empty lots dedicated to environmental conservation. The goal of these workshops would be to educate residents on tax benefits for land conservation and educate the public on opportunities to work with non-profit land conservation organizations. Green-spaces and wildlife habitat are vital to the character and economic health of Beech Mountain and the town encourages local residents to become personally involved in their preservation.
Goal LU.G3: Focus Development toward Existing Commercial and Residential Areas

As Beech Mountain’s population grows, it will become increasingly important to focus growth toward existing commercial and residential neighborhoods. By focusing development, the town can reduce the town’s infrastructure and utility costs. A town center surrounded by dense residential neighborhoods can help to develop a stronger sense of community and support local business. Furthermore, focusing growth that occurs in central locations preserves the rural and untouched land on the fringes of Beech Mountain.

Policy LU.G3.P1: Redevelopment and infill development will occur in appropriate areas

Support increased density of land uses in appropriate neighborhoods and commercial areas. Prime redevelopment examples are vacant or dilapidated lots within existing neighborhoods and commercial areas, especially along Beech Mountain Parkway.

- Beech Mountain Parkway commercial areas and surrounding neighborhoods
- Base of Beech Mountain Resort
- Neighborhoods: Clusters, Charter Hills, Mariah

Strategy LU.G3.S1: Identify infill opportunities and encourage development in these locations through development incentives

The town will conduct a study to identify specific redevelopment and infill development opportunities. Development incentives could include reducing or waiving construction permit fees, expedited review/permitting, or exemption from certain zoning ordinances.

Strategy LU.G3.S2: Target public investments to preferred infill and redevelopment areas

Beech Mountain will target infrastructure improvements to preferred infill development and redevelopment areas. These improvements may include street improvements, utility upgrades, and pedestrian amenities such as sidewalks, benches, and lighting. Focusing development saves the town money when providing infrastructure for commercial and residential uses.

![Chart Q8 What is your overall perspective towards residential growth and development on Beech Mountain?](image-url)
Goal LU.G4: Prioritize Recreation Among Land Uses
The importance of the outdoors and the natural environment in Beech Mountain cannot be overemphasized. One of the ways the outdoors is brought into the lives of Beech Mountain’s residents and visitors is through recreation activities. By improving our outdoor recreational opportunities, we can improve the quality of life for residents and visitors. Acquiring and preserving space for recreational activities (including open space for passive recreation) should be a high priority for the Town.

Policy LU.G4.P1: Enhance and connect the existing Beech Mountain Trail System
Beech Mountain has a substantial trail system that provides recreational opportunities for residents and visitors of all ages. Trails vary in character and difficulty from wide gravel paths to steep and rocky traverses. The trails offer a chance to enjoy the beautiful and unique ecology of Beech Mountain. By enhancing the trail system and increasing its interconnectedness, Beech Mountain can better access to more routes and functional uses for its residents and visitors.

Strategy LU.G4.S1: Update the Beech Mountain trail map and maintain a plan for linkages and destinations
Beech Mountain will evaluate and update the current trail system along with possible destinations, linkages, problems and opportunities along the trails. By prioritizing the issues, the town can develop a plan to provide a more complete trail system that makes our mountain’s beauty accessible to all Beech Mountain residents.

Strategy LU.G4.S2: Encourage or Require Trail Dedication in new developments
Based on the proposed trail plan, the town will require new trails to be dedicated and constructed by developers and/or landowners when the trails have the current or potential ability to provide a needed linkage between the new developments and key destinations.
[Adopt official Trails Master Plan – develop ordinance for dedication/construction of trail linkages]

Policy LU.G4.P2: Acquire Land for Recreational Purposes
Recognizing the importance of recreation on the quality of life in Beech Mountain, the Town should adopt and adhere to a policy of acquiring property for recreation purposes when possible.

Strategy LU.G4.S3: Set aside funds in the Capital Improvement Plan and in the Town’s annual budget for the acquisition of land. Use recreation or conservation prioritize parcels for acquisition and be proactive in negotiations to secure these.

Goal LU.G5: Develop a Plan for the Future Land Use of “Buckeye Hills West” and “Westerly Hills”
To the north and west of Buckeye Lake lie vast expanses of uninhabited, vacant residential lots-- the “Westerly Hills” and “Buckeye Hills West” subdivisions. These areas, taken together with the surrounding large tracts, comprise over 500 acres. Though these areas are vacant, they are far from untouched. Rough graded dirt roads abound and crisscross the landscape, providing access to where prior speculation has subdivided the land into roughly 375 lots in diverse private ownership. Because of their remoteness and the impracticality of development on them, these lots can generally be
acquired for low cost. The fate of these areas presents Beech Mountain with some of its greatest opportunities and some of its greatest challenges regarding land use in the coming decades.

This land holds the potential for many possible uses:

- Sufficient infrastructure investments such as road improvements and water, sewer, and electrical utility extensions could allow these tracts to one day serve the medium density residential purposes to which they were once dedicated.
- If the typical \( \frac{1}{3} \) to \( \frac{1}{2} \) acre lots were conglomerated into larger parcels, they could support low-density residential use, with little or no infrastructure requirements. Inventive town policies and strategies could potentially encourage the recombination of land here to sizes that are marketable and usable.
- The lots have tremendous potential for both active and passive recreation uses. They could serve as anything from a nature preserve to a campground to a mountain biking terrain park.
- The area could support some other type of land use not yet entertained or envisioned.
- Explore potential for Transfer of Development Rights

Future research should analyze the benefits of these and other potential uses and put this issue forth for public input and decision making. It is clear that the Town should develop a policy towards the development of these areas and employ appropriate strategies consistent with that policy. Failing to undertake any stance on these areas will either result in the land continuing to be underutilized or being eventually developed in a sporadic and inconsistent fashion.
Land Use: Discussion and Conclusion

This plan has laid out several strategies and policies by which the Town can continue to grow, but grow smarter and grow better. These policies include adapting “smart growth principles” that have been successful in other municipalities to the unique characteristics of Beech Mountain. They focus on conserving and protecting our open spaces and prioritizing recreational land use through methods like encouraging infill development. They also include being proactive regarding the utilization and development of Beech Mountain’s large vacant subdivisions in the Westerly Hills and Buckeye Hills West areas, and a pledge to see those areas developed according to an adopted policy, rather than see them developed incongruently and without direction.

Once the rest of Beech Mountain’s land is subdivided and developed, there won’t be any more of it. Therefore, we need to ensure that further development is the right kind of development and that it is done right. Once again, the road for the success of Beech Mountain lies in the balance between the competing interests of development versus conservation. It is critical to the Town’s future to plan for both the right amount and right type of growth that will preserve the characteristics that make Beech Mountain special.