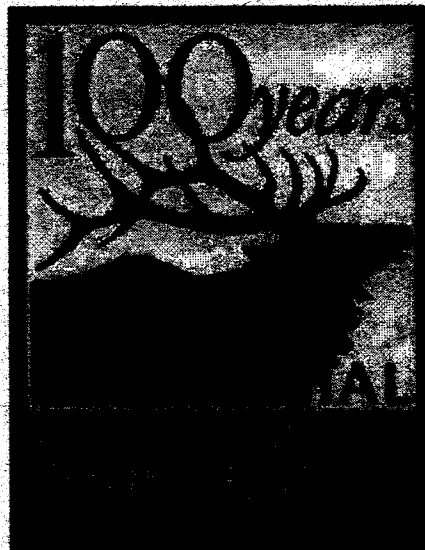


*Town of Elkton  
Comprehensive Plan  
2004-2024*

*December, 2006*



**TOWN OF ELKTON**  
**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**December, 2006**

# ELKTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### ***PURPOSE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN***

#### **Role and Content of the Comprehensive Plan**

This Comprehensive Plan provides a general guideline for community development in the Town of Elkton. A comprehensive plan should be a community's statement of its future goals and desires, based on realistic assessment of both current and projected conditions. The plan typically is developed under the direction of the planning commission and is a process that causes the community to look closely at itself. Essentially, the community must evaluate 1) where it is now, 2) where it wants to be, and 3) how to get there. Once completed, the plan serves as a guide from which to develop the steps or implementation measures needed to reach the stated goals.

The scope and purpose of the comprehensive plan is described in the Code of Virginia, Section 15.1-446.1:

In the preparation of a comprehensive plan the [planning] commission shall make careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of the existing conditions and trends of growth, and of the probable future requirements of its territory and inhabitants. The comprehensive plan shall be made with the purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the territory which will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants.

The comprehensive plan shall be general in nature, in that it shall designate the general or approximate location, character, and extent of each feature shown on the plan and shall indicate where existing lands or facilities are proposed to be extended, widened, removed, relocated, vacated, narrowed, abandoned, or changed in use as the case may be.

Such plan, with the accompanying maps, plats, charts, and descriptive matter, shall show the commission's long-range recommendations for the general development of the territory covered by the plan..., including the location of existing or proposed recycling centers. It may include, but need not be limited to:

1. The designation of areas for various types of public and private development and use, such as different kinds of residential, business, industrial, agricultural, conservation, recreation, public service, flood plain and drainage, and other areas;

2. The designation of a system of transportation facilities such as streets, roads, highways, parkways, railways, bridges, viaducts, waterways, airports, ports, terminals, and other like facilities;
3. The designation of a system of community service facilities such as parks, forests, schools, playgrounds, public buildings and institutions, hospitals, community centers, waterworks, sewage disposal or waste disposal areas, and the like;
4. The designation of historical areas and areas for urban renewal or other treatment;
5. The designation of areas for the implementation of reasonable groundwater protection measures;
6. An official map, a capital improvements program, a subdivision ordinance, a zoning ordinance and zoning district maps, and agricultural and forestal district maps, where applicable; and
7. The designation of areas for the implementation of measures to promote the construction and maintenance of affordable housing, sufficient to meet the current and future needs of residents of all levels of income in the locality while considering the current and future needs of the planning district in which the locality is situated.

The exact composition of the plan is left open to the locality, except that such topics as the following must be surveyed and studied (Section 15.1-447):

1. Use of land, preservation of agricultural and forestal land, production of food and fiber, characteristics and conditions of existing development, trends of growth or changes, natural resources, ground water, surface water, geologic factors, population factors, employment, environmental and economic factors, existing public facilities, drainage, flood control and flood damage prevention measures, transportation facilities, the need for affordable housing in both the locality and the planning district in which it is situated, and any other matters relating to the subject matter and general purposes of the comprehensive plan.

However, if a locality chooses not to survey and study historic areas, then the locality shall include historic areas in the comprehensive plan, if such areas are identified and surveyed by the Department of Historic Resources.

2. Probable future economic and population growth of the territory and requirements therefore.

The plan also must recommend methods of implementation. These can include an official map, a capital improvements program, a subdivision ordinance, and a zoning ordinance and map.

### Development of the Plan

The plan is developed by the planning commission, which then forwards it to the governing body for official approval. At least two public hearings must be held, one when the planning commission considers the plan and another when the governing body considers it (unless these hearings are held jointly).

The Code specifies that the community must review its Comprehensive Plan every five years. In the interim, amendments may be made to the plan, following due public notice and a public hearing.

### Legal Status of the Comprehensive Plan

Once the plan is adopted by the Town Council, development proposals can be approved or disapproved based on whether they are compatible with the plan. It also is the document on which other, more specific planning documents, such as subdivision and zoning ordinances, a capital improvements plan, and the official land use map, should be based.

The Code of Virginia states in Section 15.1-456 that a comprehensive plan adopted by the governing body of a locality "shall control the general or approximate location, character and extent of each feature shown on the plan. Thereafter, unless such feature is already shown on the adopted master plan ... no street or connection to an existing street, park or other public areas, public building or public structure, public utility facility or public service corporation facility other than railroad facility, whether publicly or privately owned, shall be constructed, established or authorized, unless and until the general location or approximate location, character, and extent thereof has been submitted to and approved by the local commission as being substantially in accord with the adopted comprehensive plan or part thereof."

### **PAST PLANNING EFFORTS**

This is Elkton's second comprehensive plan. The first plan was developed in 1977 as part of the overall Rockingham County comprehensive plan and included the area surrounding Elkton. It was produced by county staff with the help of an Elkton Area Citizens' Committee. The 1977 plan consisted of two parts: 1) Existing Conditions: Background for the Comprehensive Plan and 2) the Comprehensive Plan, including land use recommendations for specific areas.

The 1977 plan was very detailed and thorough. To the extent that certain natural features such as soils have not changed over this time, the 1977 Existing Conditions section will remain the most detailed source of information. However, because the 1977 plan was developed by the County and covered a significant area beyond the Town limits, these sections have been summarized and tailored to include only the Town itself.

## CHAPTER 2 HISTORY

### ***HISTORY OF THE ELKTON AREA***

#### **Early Settlement**

The Elkton area was one of the first in the Shenandoah Valley to be settled by colonists. Before the 1700s, migratory Indians ranged throughout the Valley and were its only human inhabitants. In the 1700s, European settlers began branching farther westward. General Alexander Spotswood and the Knights of the Golden Horseshoe crossed the barrier of the Blue Ridge Mountains in their famous 1716 expedition and claimed the area for Great Britain. They apparently crossed at Swift Run Gap, so their first views of the Valley would have been of the area near Elkton.

The first influx of settlers to the Valley, however, were German immigrants, who followed the Valley south from Pennsylvania. Adam Miller (Mueller), born in 1703 in Shreisheim Germany, is credited with establishing the first permanent settlement in the Shenandoah Valley. He settled first north of Elkton near the Rockingham County-Page County line in approximately 1726, but later moved to the banks of the Shenandoah River near the current Town. His cabin was still standing in 1958. Miller lived until 1783 and his descendants held the homestead well into the twentieth century.

The Millers and two other families, the Harnsbergers and the Kites, each held large land grants near Elkton. For several generations, there was not much additional settlement in the area. William Kite's land grant contained what is today the center of Town. The Millers held the land to the north and the Harnsbergers to the south. The Harnsbergers, originally from Switzerland, were living in the area by 1751. The Kites also were an influential family. The land grant to William Kite was dated 1801 and contained the Lithia Springs, which are still owned by descendants and serve as a partial water source to the Town.

#### **Growing Settlement of Conrad's Store**

It was not until 1821 that there were enough settlers to warrant building the Elk Run Liberty Meeting House. By the mid 1800s, the area was called Conrad's Store. The store was run by

Stephen Conrad, who had married a descendant of Adam Miller. This two-story log building still stands on business Route 33, at the corner of Shenandoah Avenue and Spotswood Trail.

The settlement received its first post office in 1866. Called Roadside, it stood just east of the current Town limits. From 1870 to 1880, the post office was called Elk Run. Finally, in 1881, the name was changed to Elkton.

### Early Business and Industry

The Shenandoah River was the early transportation route. Boats carried goods down the river to Georgetown or to Harpers Ferry. These boats, typically 9 1/2 feet wide and 76 feet long, would be sold for lumber at the end of the trip and the crew would walk home. The last known boat trip from the area was in 1889.

Milling and tanning were two prominent early industries. From approximately 1841 to 1869, a tan yard was operated on Elk Run. The tan yard, built by Will Kite, was destroyed by Union troops in 1864 but rebuilt the next year.

Conrad Kite, son of William Kite, operated a woolen mill just outside the current town limits on the western banks of the Shenandoah River near the bridge. This mill manufactured uniforms for the Confederate forces. In 1866, Dr. S.P.H. Miller operated a sawmill on the banks of the river near the bridge.

In 1870, a terrible flood caused much damage in Elkton. The following year, John Cover, from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, started a tannery that became the Town's first major industry. The tannery stood on Rockingham Street. It was expanded in 1917 and a year later was processing 300 hides a day and employing 200 people. It was sold to Continental Shoe Company in 1923, but burned in 1925 and was never operated again.

### Civil War

In the spring of 1862, Stonewall Jackson's Valley Campaign brought the war close to Elkton. At that time, the settlement contained only a few homes and other buildings. In preparation for the coming battles, the Confederate army camped near Conrad's Store, with General Jackson headquartered at the Kite homestead and General Ewell at Dr. S.P.H. Miller's. Troops set up camp at a number of sites, including near the Town spring and near the current Elkton Middle School. The Elk Run Meeting House (dismantled in 1910) was used to keep prisoners.

Jackson chose this strategic location at the foot of Swift Run Gap and flanked by Massanutten Mountain because it would enable him to fend off attack from much larger Union forces, yet threaten their rear if they tried to advance south toward Staunton. Several battles were fought in eastern Rockingham County. Just before the battles of Cross Keys and Port Republic, Jackson ordered the bridge over the Shenandoah at Conrad's Store burned. After Jackson left the Valley, Union troops continued the destruction in the area, burning Kite's woolen mill, Jennings' flour mill, and numerous barns.

Like the rest of the Valley, Elkton had much to recover from when the war ended. Industrial and farming structures had been destroyed. Money and materials were scarce. Not until the coming of the railroads did new opportunities open up to the Valley.

### Railroads

The railroad sparked much of the development of Elkton. Starting in the late 1860s plans were made to provide rail service from the Potomac River to Salem, Virginia. This program, however, was thwarted by the financial depression in the 1870s. Dr. S.P.H. Miller was influential in promoting the development of a railroad to transport agricultural goods and iron ore from the deposits which had recently been discovered in the area. In 1881, the line from Hagerstown, Maryland, to Waynesboro, Virginia, was opened. In 1897, the Chesapeake and Western opened track from Elkton to Bridgewater. After 1938, the service was expanded to Staunton on the old Southern Railway lines.

### Springs

The Elkton area is noted for its springs. In the late 1800s, as health resorts and medicine shows became popular, people flocked to the springs. Captain H.A. Kite capitalized on the excellent waters that flowed from the spring on his property and which could now be shipped by railroad. The Elk Lithia Water Company was formed in 1891. Business faded after the turn of the century, however, and the rights to the spring reverted to the Kite family. In 1928, the Town acquired the water rights. Bear Lithia Spring, on land sold by Adam Miller to Jacob Bear, supported a hotel and provided water sold far and wide by the Bear Lithia Spring Company (1906-17), later named the Great Bear Company.

## The Boom Era

The coming of the railroad brought a swarm of speculation up and down the Shenandoah Valley in the late 1800s. Development companies formed and prospective towns were laid out. Many of these "boom towns" never came to pass. Others, like Elkton, were built, but on a less grandiose scale than planned.

The Elkton Improvement Company, chartered in 1890, took as its goal the conduct of mining and business operations in Rockingham, Page, Greene, and Albemarle counties, the laying out of towns, and the establishment of governments for these towns. Largely through the diligence of the company's president, Dr. S.P.H. Miller (1835-1895), Elkton took shape. The 1890 plan for Elkton drawn by A.C. Walker contains many identifying features of the Town today, although not all of the plan was developed. For example, the plan calls for a "Riverside Park" just south of where Spotswood Avenue crosses the river. The plan envisioned a densely populated town laid out in grids punctuated by diagonal thoroughfares and accommodating the curves of the Shenandoah River and Elk Run. These tiny lots are the basis for today's tax parcels.

The 1890s saw a profusion of industries in the Town, including mills, factories, machine shops, wagon works, tanneries, and canneries. A manganese mine was operated from 1891 to 1902 approximately two miles east of Elkton. In addition, Marshall's mill, built in 1876 and powered by steam, produced everything from flour and feeds to apple butter. The mill stood on the banks of Elk Run and its mill race gave Water Street its name. The first Town newspaper, "the Elkton Index," was published in 1891.

Like many boom towns, Elkton featured a major hotel. "The Elkton," opened in 1891, was designed by the famous New York architect Stanford White and had 120 rooms. It became a popular summer resort. The opening of the Shenandoah National Park in 1936 and a new name, "the Golden Horseshoe Tavern," extended the hotel's popularity beyond the resort era. In 1941, the hotel was modernized and renamed "the Gables Hotel." It was closed in 1956 and razed two years later. The Route 33 bypass cuts through the location where this hotel stood.

## Religion

The first church in the town was Elk Run Liberty Meeting House, which was open to all Christian denominations. In 1821, leaders of the community, including Henry Miller, Sr., Jacob Conrad, George Baugher, Henry Miller, Jr., and Jacob Harnsberger directed that a log building be