

Preamble

The city's eighth Comprehensive Plan continues 68 years of comprehensive planning for Williamsburg. The 2021 Comprehensive Plan updates and refines the work done on earlier plans.

Perhaps the best introduction to comprehensive planning in Williamsburg is the introduction to the first Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 1953:

“Williamsburg is chiefly notable because it is a city with a most unique and important history. The city plan described in this report is the recognition that it is a city which should look forward to a significant future also.

City planning has come to be an accepted municipal activity of American cities. Its objective is the development of the most satisfactory and desirable community possible in relation to the city's site and economic potential. This is to be achieved through a gradual correction of past mistakes in city-building and careful control of new growth. The city plan is a diagram or blueprint, carefully designed, indicating the most logical arrangement of the community's major features - streets, schools, parks, sewers, residential areas, commercial centers, and the like. As existing buildings or facilities are replaced or new buildings are added, coordination of each with the city plan will, in the end, result in an economical, efficient, and desirable community for its citizens and an attractive city to visit. Any other method of city building will inevitably result in duplication, waste, and costly mistakes in the expenditure of both public and private funds.

To build a community in accordance with a city plan results in a city with far more desirable living and working conditions at a material saving of time, effort, and money.

Planning problems in Williamsburg are far more intricate and complicated than in the usual city of its size. The many thousands of visitors require accommodations and create traffic difficulties. Substantial growth is occurring. Present problems must be solved, and future growth accommodated in such a manner that the city may be an entirely satisfactory place in which to live and work. The Restoration of the colonial city maybe even more enjoyably and profitably viewed by increasing numbers of visitors. The lesson taught by this Restoration is important to the enhancement of national pride in the origins of our nation, thus making the planned development of the entire community of Williamsburg a matter of more than local importance.”

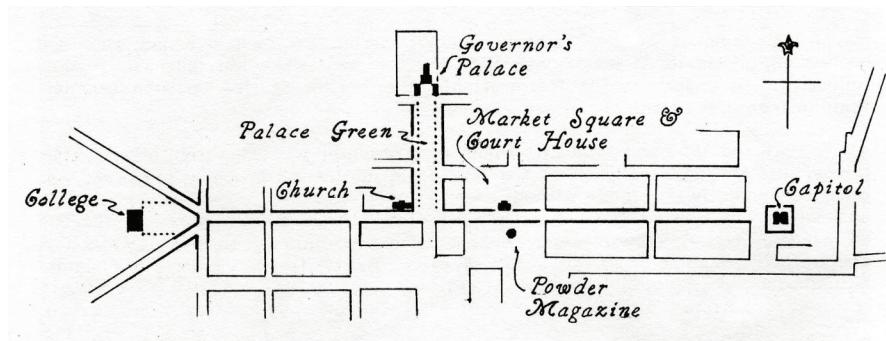
Perhaps now more than ever, Williamsburg needs to preserve its historic center while at the same time encouraging new development of compatible scale and character. As with 1953, 1968, 1981, 1989, 1998, 2006, and 2013 Comprehensive Plans, the challenge will not end with the adoption of this Plan, but will continue through revisions of the zoning ordinance and other measures implementing the recommendations of the Plan.

Although the 1953 Comprehensive Plan was the first formal plan adopted under State law procedures, it was not the city's first plan. The planning of Williamsburg began some 320 years earlier in 1633 by decree of the Virginia General Assembly. The

Preamble

decreed designed a plan to encourage a new settlement at Middle Plantation as a defense in depth for Jamestown with high ground, better drainage, good water, and more central to the growing colony, out of the range of a ship's guns, and, perhaps, somewhat less vulnerable to plagues of mosquitoes from the marshes surrounding Jamestown.

The decision to move the Capitol and establish the City of Williamsburg followed the State House's burning in Jamestown in 1698. The 1699 act authorizing the new city provided several features of a city plan, including street names and setback regulations. By the time Williamsburg reached its prime as the colonial capital of Virginia, it had achieved the formal organization intended initially. The sketch below is from the famous Frenchman's Map of 1782.



The new capital flourished for eighty-one years even though its resident population probably never exceeded 2,000. The town would fill to overflowing during the "Publick Times," usually in the Spring and Fall, when the Assemblies were held and the courts were in session. But the population was moving

westward, and the strategic Virginia Peninsula was vulnerable to attack. In 1780, the capital moved from Williamsburg to Richmond.

Although Williamsburg did face an economic decline after the removal of the capital to Richmond and because of a prolonged occupation during the Civil War, it began to prosper with the advent of the railroad in the last 19th and early 20th centuries, before the Rockefeller's involvement. William & Mary also expanded greatly in the first two decades of the 1900s, as did Eastern State Hospital. Colonial Williamsburg did indeed lead to a more stable prosperity, especially during the Great Depression.

All of the city's Comprehensive Plans have recognized that the city's Colonial heart could neither be properly preserved nor made conveniently accessible without careful consideration of a much wider area. When official planning work began in 1951, it was apparent that the then-recent trend of growth would continue around the old city, as it has to this day. The completion of Route 199 around the western side of the city and the resulting development has added to the existing growth pressures and will continue to make preserving the city's character a great challenge.

The City's Planning Commission and planning staff have taken steps in this Plan to provide for orderly growth with sensitivity to both the natural and built environments. As the Historic Triangle grows and evolves, we should never lose sight of this area's and Williamsburg's place in history. We should always take appropriate steps to ensure that Williamsburg does not lose its special character.