

## 3. Sustainable Growth and Preservation Framework

### 3.1 Introduction

The Union County Comprehensive Plan is intended as a guide for decision-makers in managing future growth, promoting sustainable economic development, and preserving farmland, forestland, and other key resources. This chapter establishes the overall framework to achieve these basic goals. The sustainable growth and preservation framework will influence all aspects of the plan, such as housing, economic development, transportation, natural resources, community facilities, and infrastructure.

The sustainable growth and preservation framework was developed through an open planning process that has provided numerous opportunities for public input, including two series of public meetings that attracted nearly 400 participants, municipal officials' meetings, a random, statistically valid mail/telephone survey of County residents, stakeholder interviews and focus groups, "Meetings in a Box", and website comments. Top priorities for Union County identified through this process include:

- Develop a shared regional vision for Union County.
- Preserve farmland and agriculture.
- Balance growth and economic development with agricultural preservation.
- Create better ordinances and enhance zoning to contain sprawl and reduce land consumption.

- Build close to existing towns; support smart growth and traditional neighborhood development.
- Improve mobility options by installing trails, installing walkways, improving pedestrian, buggy, and bicycle safety, and providing public transportation alternatives.

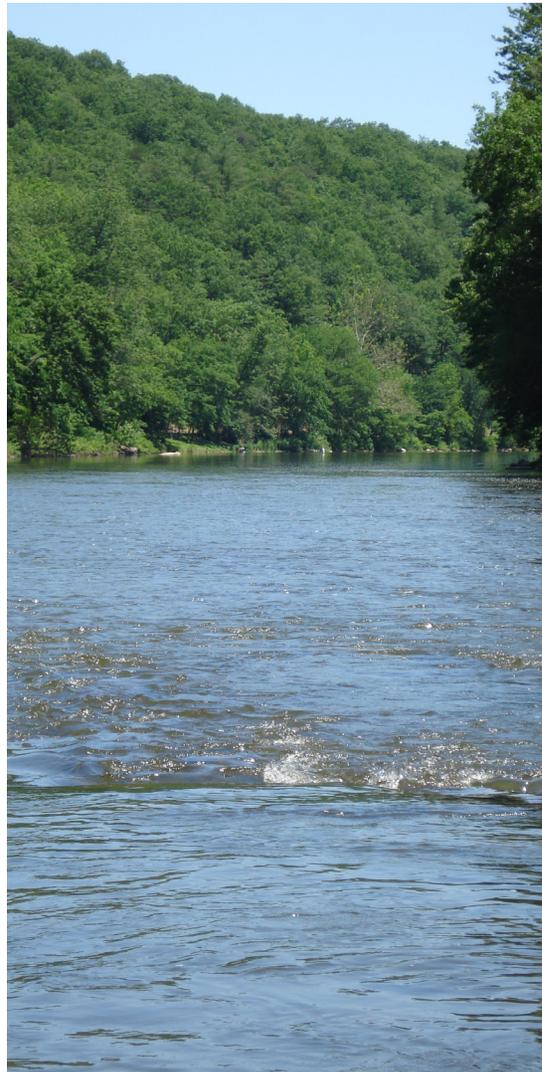
Based on this input, the consultant team, Plan Advisory Team (PAT), and Union County Planning Department worked together to prepare the sustainable growth and preservation framework. It consists of a Vision Statement, sustainable growth principles, and a growth management strategy.

This Vision Statement and supporting sustainable growth principles are presented in Section 3.2. A series of growth scenarios were then developed to highlight choices available to the County in managing projected future development to achieve the vision. Presented in Section 3.3, these scenarios include the baseline scenario – projected growth through 2050 assuming current development trends continue – and three alternatives to the baseline that direct future growth to be more consistent with the vision. The scenarios were evaluated by the PAT and a preferred scenario prepared for presentation and review at a second public meeting series. The results of these meetings indicate broad pub-



lic consensus regarding the vision and preferred growth scenario, which has been developed into the growth management framework presented in Section 3.4.

## 3.2 Vision Statement and Sustainable Growth Principles



**Vision**  
*The Vision Statement defines the place that citizens want Union County to be in the year 2030 (See Chapter 2). In this vision,*

**Union County will be a prosperous and beautiful valley by:**

- Protecting precious natural resources and agriculture*
- Supporting sustainable economic growth and viable towns*
- Promoting its unique town and country lifestyle*

Union County's western, central, and eastern planning areas will contribute their special strengths to achieving these goals through three concurrent regional visions:

<i>The western region will be a home for rural enterprise and connecting with nature.</i>	<i>The central region will be the heart of Union County's agricultural and small town heritage.</i>	<i>The eastern region will be a center of county government, medical service, and higher education in a town and country setting.</i>
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It is evident from input received throughout the planning process that citizens care deeply about Union County and wish to see its special attributes retained in the future, as reflected in the Vision Statement. Achieving this vision will require that growth be managed to conserve resources for future generations in accordance with the most commonly accepted definition of sustainable development:

**...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (Brundtland Commission, 1987)**

A series of principles have been defined to provide direction for achieving sustainable future growth in Union County. These principles address a primary theme of the Vision Statement – maintaining the County's town and country heritage – as well as two priority issues identified in the citizen survey – the need to conserve energy and control taxes.

These principles informed development of the growth scenarios and growth management framework presented in the next sections (3.3 and 3.4).

**The sustainability principles are:**

**1. Focus new development in and around established communities**

- Promote reinvestment in existing towns and villages
- Develop in proximity to existing infrastructure

**2. Preserve rural resources**

- Maintain prime farmland soils and limit the impact of new development on agriculture
- Preserve sensitive natural features and scenic views

**3. Conserve energy**

- Decrease fossil fuel consumption
- Reduce automobile use / promote transportation alternatives

**4. Conserve fiscal resources**

- Limit the negative impacts of new development on municipal budgets
- Limit the negative impacts of new development on community services (police, fire, EMS, etc.)



### 3.3 Growth Scenarios



To highlight choices in managing future growth, a baseline scenario and three alternative growth scenarios were created and reviewed with the PAT. The baseline scenario illustrates existing developed land (residential, commercial, institutional, etc.) and the land area needed to accommodate projected future residential growth through 2050 at an overall density of 1 net dwelling unit (DU)/acre, the average for new development in the County between 2001 and 2006. The average density accounts for land needed for road rights-of-way and utilities. In this scenario 60% of new residential development will occur next to existing towns and villages and 40% will occur in rural areas, reflecting the pattern of new development over the past six years.

Union County has a choice in how it will grow in the future. The purpose of developing three growth scenarios is to present distinct alternatives to the pattern of sprawl development represented by the baseline scenario, consistent with the direction set by the Vision Statement and sustainable growth principles. The alternatives are conceptual in nature but account for the general land area needed to accommodate projected future housing growth (which will consume the vast majority of land needed for future development in the County) and for the preservation of important resource areas. More detail on future land use is provided in Chapter 6 – Land Use.

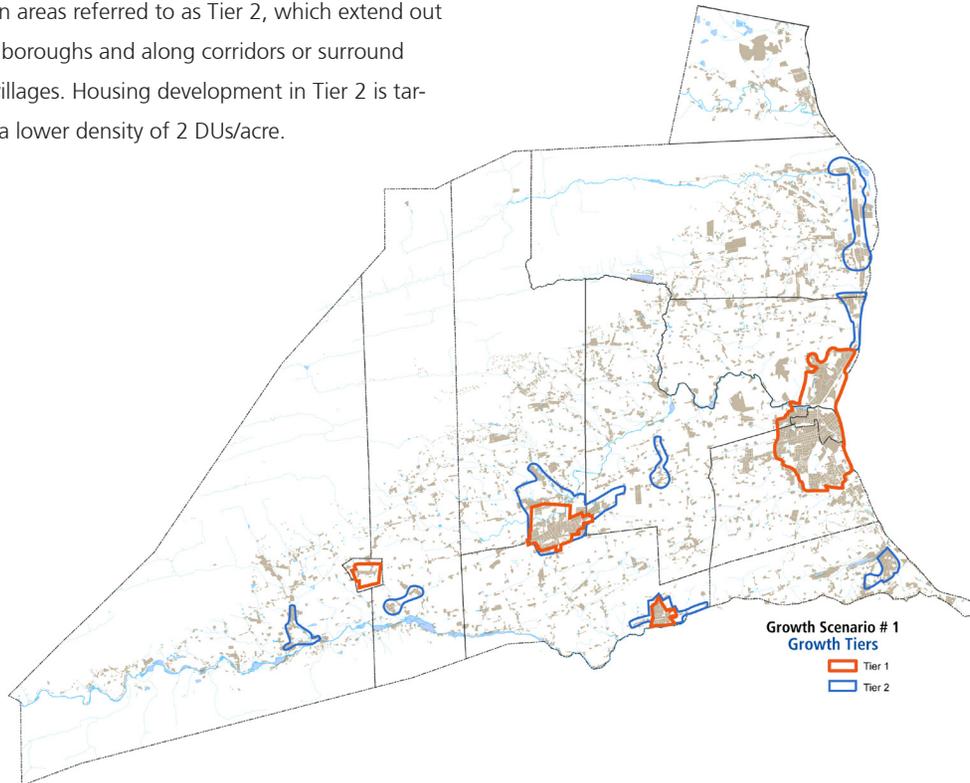
Each scenario shares the underlying premise that prime farmlands and major woodlands will be preserved from development, but is differentiated by its development pattern. In Scenario One, growth is focused in and around towns and villages closely following major roadways and existing utilities. Scenario Two directs new growth into compact town and village centers and places the most importance on a traditional pattern of development that limits expansion into prime farmland and natural areas. Scenario Three reduces the need to develop farmland and woodlands compared to the baseline scenario by locating some development in existing town and village centers and some development in rural neighborhoods.

#### Growth Scenario Assumptions

1. Each scenario illustrates the approximate amount of land needed to accommodate future growth projections through 2050. Currently developed land is excluded from this calculation.
2. Housing projections through 2050 were prepared by the Union County Planning Commission using the linear regression method.
3. Rural resource areas were delineated based on existing agricultural and woodland zoning districts and County GIS data.
4. All scenarios accommodate 80% of projected housing growth and all major non-agricultural commercial (retail and employment) development in designated growth areas. The remaining 20% of housing growth is assumed to occur outside of the growth areas.
5. Rights-of-way and utilities are accounted for in the growth area calculations of the land needed for new development. Land preserved as open space in rural neighborhoods is also accounted for in Scenario 3.

**Scenario One: Growth Tiers.** This scenario assumes that growth will continue to occur in and around existing towns and villages and follow public utilities and major roadways. It concentrates the majority of growth in areas referred to as Tier 1 and sets a target of 3.5 net DU/acres for residential growth. The four boroughs (Lewisburg, Mifflinburg, Hartleton, and New Berlin) are classified as Tier 1 areas. Lesser amounts of growth are focused in areas referred to as Tier 2, which extend out from the boroughs and along corridors or surround existing villages. Housing development in Tier 2 is targeted at a lower density of 2 DUs/acre.

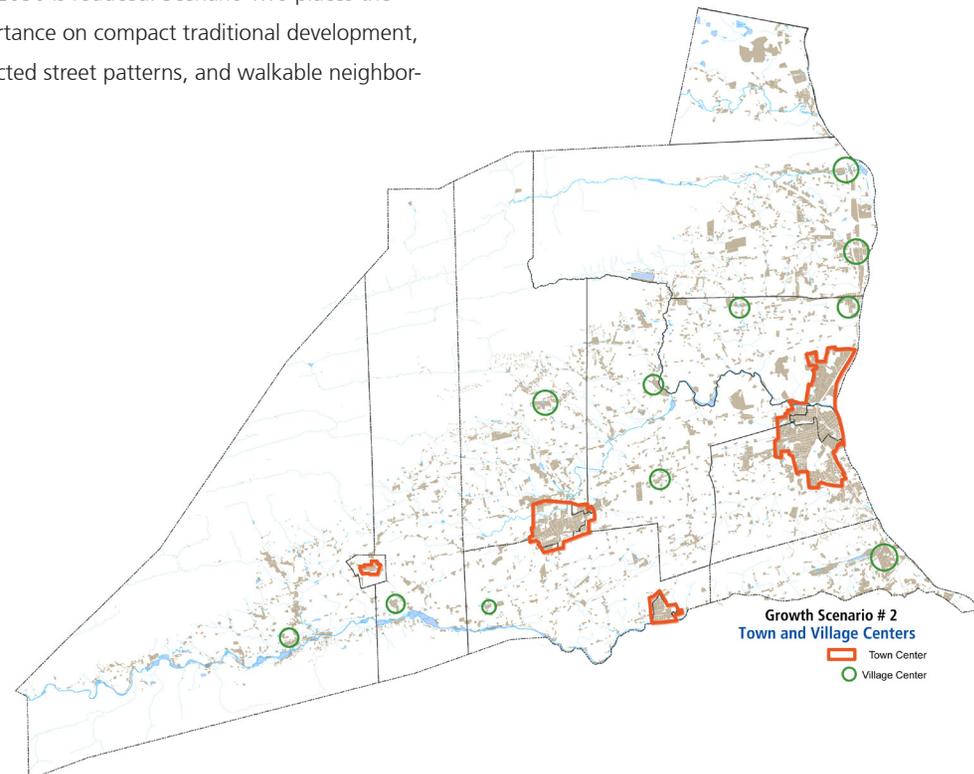
In addition to setting growth tiers, Scenario One designates Rural Resource Areas that include prime farmland, woodlands, and environmentally sensitive areas. It places importance on the efficient use of infrastructure but requires some development in agricultural areas. The map below illustrates this concept and the approximate amount of land area needed to accommodate future growth projections through 2050.





**Scenario Two: Town and Village Centers.** In Scenario Two, the focus is on directing the majority of new development into compact Town Centers at an average of 6 DU/acre and secondary amounts of growth into Village Centers at an average of 2.5 DU/acre. In this scenario, because densities are higher than in Scenario One, the land area needed to accommodate projected growth to 2050 is reduced. Scenario Two places the most importance on compact traditional development, interconnected street patterns, and walkable neighborhoods.

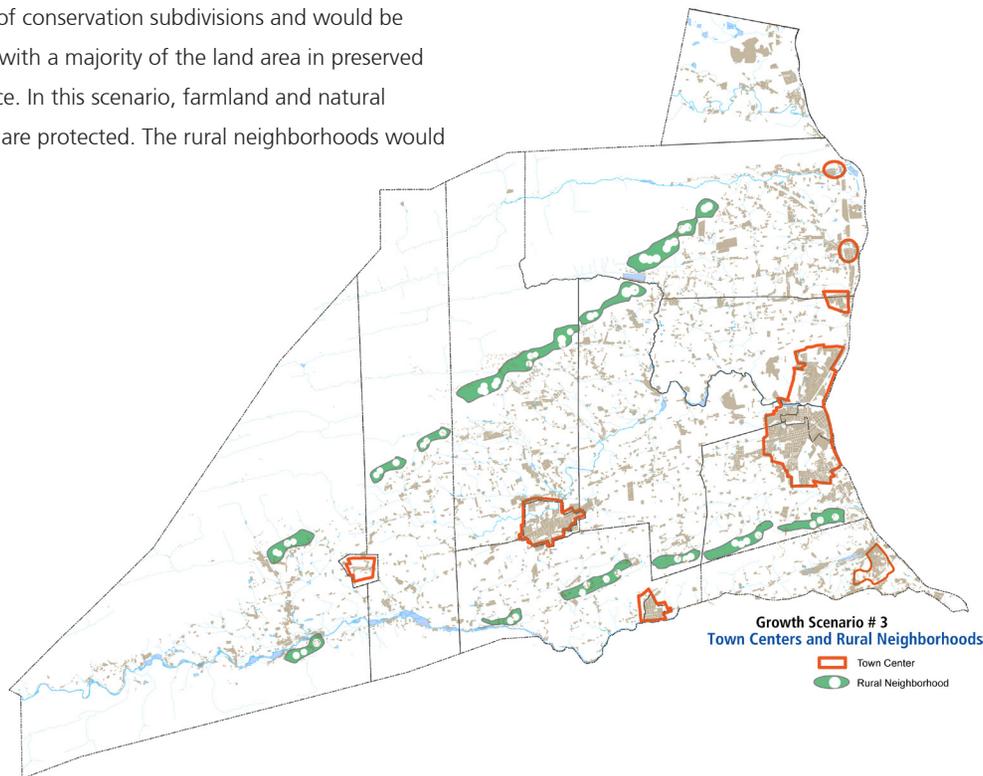
This scenario designates Rural Resource Areas, including prime farmland and woodlands, for preservation and would limit development of these areas. The map below illustrates this concept and the approximate amount of land area needed to accommodate future growth projections through 2050.



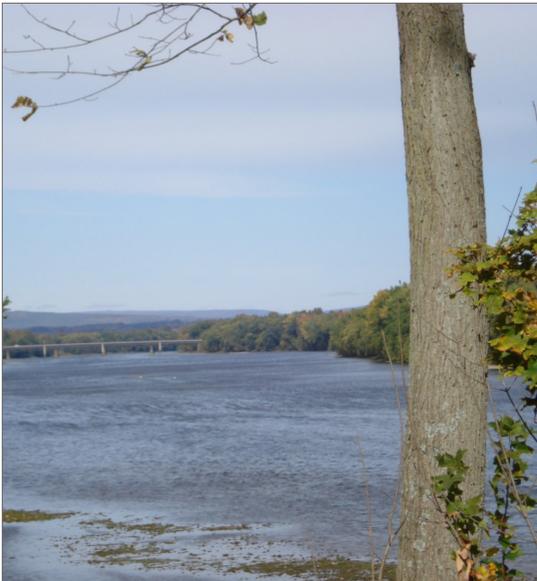
**Scenario Three: Town Centers and Rural Neighborhoods.** The third scenario directs relatively equal amounts of growth into either existing town centers or rural neighborhoods. Town center development would occur on available land in or adjacent to existing towns and villages at a target density of 3.5 DU/Acre.

Development in the rural neighborhoods would be in the form of conservation subdivisions and would be designed with a majority of the land area in preserved open space. In this scenario, farmland and natural resources are protected. The rural neighborhoods would

be located away from prime agricultural land and clustered in a manner that preserves woodlands and open space. While intended to preserve prime resources, rural neighborhoods would place demands on infrastructure and require increased public services given their location. The map below illustrates this concept and the approximate amount of land area needed to accommodate future growth projections through 2050.



## 3.4 Growth Management Strategy



The Growth Management Strategy was developed based on the vision and sustainable growth principles outlined in Section 3.2 and review of the growth scenarios described in Section 3.3 by the County's Plan Advisory Team (PAT) and the Multi-Municipal PATs. The results of a questionnaire administered at the second public meeting series confirmed that this strategy reflects a broad consensus of the Union County community. While most similar to Scenario Two, the framework includes elements of each of the alternatives. The Growth Management Strategy was developed using current population, land use, and zoning characteristics and trends as a reference point (see Chapter 2 for further detail).



The Growth Management Strategy is designed to support the sustainability principles set forth in Section 3.2. It is intended to provide a framework for development that efficiently uses existing infrastructure, adds economic value, and preserves the rich natural and agricultural resources of the County (see Figure 3-1 – Growth Management Framework).

The Growth Management Strategy includes two parallel components: a Town Policy and a Rural Policy. Similar to the growth scenarios, it sets targets of 80% of

new residential development to occur in growth areas designated in and around existing towns and villages and 20% to occur in rural areas. The following descriptions give an overview of the two policies; more detail is provided in Section 5.3 Future Land Use.

### Town Policy

In the Town Policy growth is directed to Primary Growth Areas focused on the four existing boroughs: Hartleton in the Western Planning Area, Mifflinburg and New Berlin in the Central Planning Area, and Lewisburg in the Eastern Planning Area. In addition, a growth area was designated in Gregg Township by the US 15 South Comprehensive Plan and is shown on Figure 3-1 (Growth Management Strategy).

A Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) pattern is encouraged for new and infill residential areas. In this pattern, neighborhoods are centered on a ¼ to ½ mile walking radius from a central place – such as a mixed use town center or school. The street network is connected to the town center and accessible to pedestrians, bikers, and motorists.

The Town Policy calls for all major new commercial (retail and employment) development to be located in

Primary Growth Areas or in designated employment centers. In keeping with TND principles, commercial areas should have a mixed-use core and include retail, office, and employment land uses. In some of the Primary Growth Areas, employment uses can be concentrated near highly accessible roadways and incorporate a mix of uses. Provision of parks and recreational space to serve residents' needs is another key component of the Town Policy. To create a clear edge between town and country, a "greenbelt" buffer is envisioned along the edge of the Primary Growth Area boundary. Farms preserved through the County's agricultural preservation program and conservation subdivisions that establish transitional open space between the town pattern and the surrounding agricultural landscape can be used to help delineate the buffer.



Example of Conservation Subdivision (© Randall J. Arendt. *Conservation Design for Subdivisions: A Practical Guide to Creating Open Space Networks*. (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1996).

## Rural Policy

The Rural Policy calls for development located outside of Primary Growth Areas to be focused on villages (referred to as Secondary Growth Areas). Smaller in scale than towns, villages generally include a main street and a surrounding neighborhood. Growth in the villages is also envisioned to occur in a traditional neighborhood pattern, with a ¼ mile walking radius from the village center or crossroads. Village greens, bicycle paths, and other recreational uses are important components of the Rural Policy.

Development in the Secondary Growth Areas is similar in concept to the Primary Growth Areas, but is projected to occur at a lower density in villages than in towns. Additionally, a higher percentage of growth will be directed to the towns than to the villages.

A second component of the Rural Policy is the designation of Rural Resource Areas. These areas include agricultural and natural areas that should be preserved from development, due to their prime farmland soils or other natural factors such as presence of steep slopes or woodland habitat.



The third component of the Rural Policy is the creation of Rural Development Areas. As indicated above, a target of 20% of development which would otherwise occur outside of the Primary and Secondary Growth Areas is directed into Rural Development Areas, including Rural Neighborhoods, Rural Business Centers, and “on-farm” development.

In Rural Neighborhoods, conservation subdivision design is encouraged with the majority of the land area preserved as permanent open space. These neighborhoods should be developed away from Rural Resource Areas – particularly prime agricultural land – but will contribute to overall protection of sensitive environmental resources through the permanent dedication of open space. In most instances, the Rural Neighborhoods will not be connected to public sewer and water. Rural Business Centers are areas where agricultural support services, mining, or light industrial uses occur. Located near existing farms or industrial uses in rural areas, these areas should maintain separation between rural businesses that may create noise or noxious odors and residential neighborhoods.

On-farm development refers to activities that do not involve agricultural use of the land, including businesses unrelated to farming and creation of residential lots. These activities are addressed in other chapters of the Plan.

**GROWTH MANAGEMENT STRATEGY SUMMARY**

1. 80% of new residential development is targeted to occur in Primary and Secondary Growth Areas focused on existing towns (boroughs) and villages, respectively, and 20% is targeted to occur in rural areas (see Table 3.1).
2. All major new commercial (retail and employment) development is to be located in Primary Growth Areas or in designated employment centers.
3. Rural Resource Areas – agricultural lands, woodlands, and other natural resource areas – are designated for preservation outside of Primary and Secondary Growth Areas.
4. Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) is the preferred form of development in Primary and Secondary Growth Areas.
5. Residential development in rural areas should be located away from Rural Resource Areas. Conservation subdivisions are the preferred form of development for these areas with the majority of the land area preserved as permanent open space.
6. Some commercial development (agricultural support services, mining, or light industry) is to occur in Rural Business Centers located near existing farms or industrial uses in rural areas.

**Table 3.1 Growth Area Capacity by Planning Area**

Planning Area	New housing units projected in planning area 2006-2050 <sup>1</sup>	80% of housing units projected <sup>2</sup>	Total units that can be accommodated at target densities <sup>3</sup>	Difference in units (columns 3 and 4) <sup>4</sup>	Remaining developable acres <sup>5</sup>
Eastern	3,653	2,922	4,880	+ 1,958	336 Acres
Central	3,854	3,083	3,361	+ 278	75 Acres
Western	1,178	942	1,591	+ 649	181 Acres
Union County (excludes Gregg Township)	8,685	6,948	9,832	+ 2,884	592 Acres

1. Housing units projected is the difference between total units projected in 2050 by the Union County Planning Commission using linear regression and the number of housing units estimated in 2006 for each planning area.
2. 80% of the new housing units projected in 2050.
3. Target densities are 6 DU/Acre in the Primary Growth Areas and 2.5 DU/Acre in the Secondary Growth Areas. Units that can be accommodated are calculated using developable land (excludes floodplain, steep slopes over 15%, and developed land) and multiplied by the target density. ROW and utilities are accounted for in the future acreage needs.
4. Difference between units that could be accommodated and units projected (this number does not assume area for non-residential uses, i.e. commercial, industrial, recreational land use).
5. Remaining acres that could be developed for non-residential uses (e.g., commercial, recreation, institutional, employment, etc.) in the growth areas.

Figure 3-1  
Growth Management Strategy

