

2024

IMAGINE CARY COMMUNITY PLAN

2024 UPDATE





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WITH EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION IN ITS DNA, CARY IS A GROWING, THRIVING COMMUNITY OF OVER 187,000 PEOPLE REPRESENTING MORE THAN 60 NATIONALITIES. LOCATED AT THE HEART OF CENTRAL NORTH CAROLINA'S RENOWNED TRIANGLE REGION, CARY HAS CITIZENS IN THREE COUNTIES — WAKE, CHATHAM, AND DURHAM.

Cary continues to be consistently ranked among the most desirable places to live, work, have fun, and do business in the United States. It holds a reputation for its safe neighborhoods, network of bike-friendly parks and greenways, environmental stewardship, robust business climate, and premier sports and entertainment venues. As a government, Cary aims to anticipate challenges rather than react to them while understanding and learning from its past. Cary's philosophy encourages and values collaboration, experimentation, learning, and adaptation while seizing opportunities to continue making Cary a place of inspiration and possibility.

As a guidebook to Cary's future, our Imagine Cary Community Plan, adopted Jan. 24, 2017, was the most ambitious long-range planning effort in our community's history. The process to "Imagine Cary," was built on the values, needs, and aspirations of our citizens, and the creation of Imagine Cary took several years of work, unprecedented community input, and dozens of meetings and workshops.

Throughout the process, citizens recognized that Cary was transitioning from a growing community to a maturing one—one where infill and redevelopment were becoming the norm. As such, it was time to take a fresh look at long-term planning documents.

Imagine Cary sets the long-term vision for Cary through 2040 and a course for achieving our desired future. This comprehensive document serves as a roadmap, guiding not only the future development of Cary but also how we will live, work, shop, dine, and have fun.

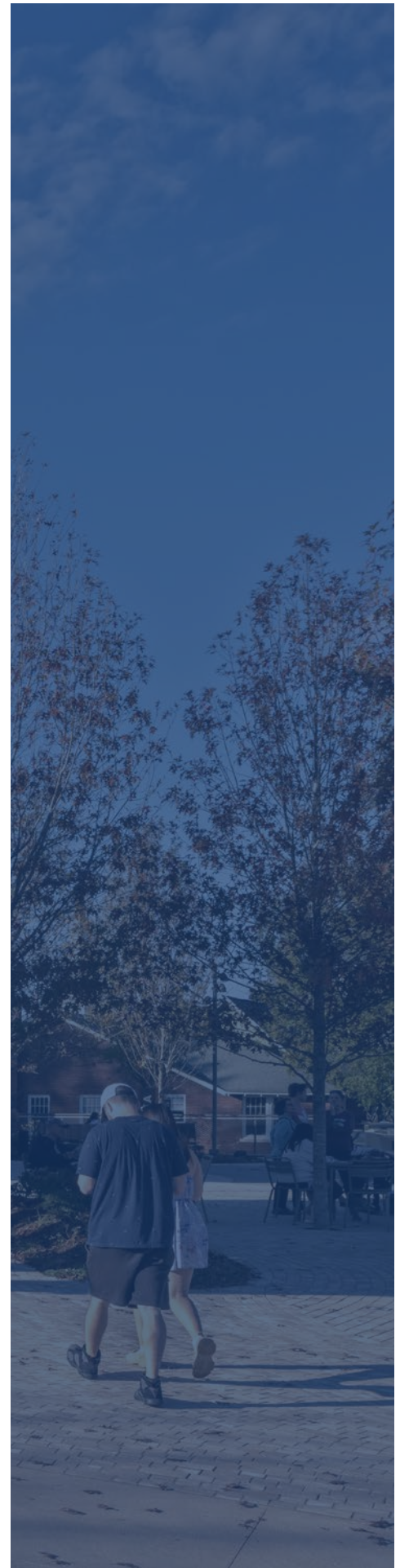
Since its adoption, the Imagine Cary Community Plan has become our reference in all that we do, from providing high-quality public services, capital planning, financial management, protecting nature and the environment, and managing future land use.

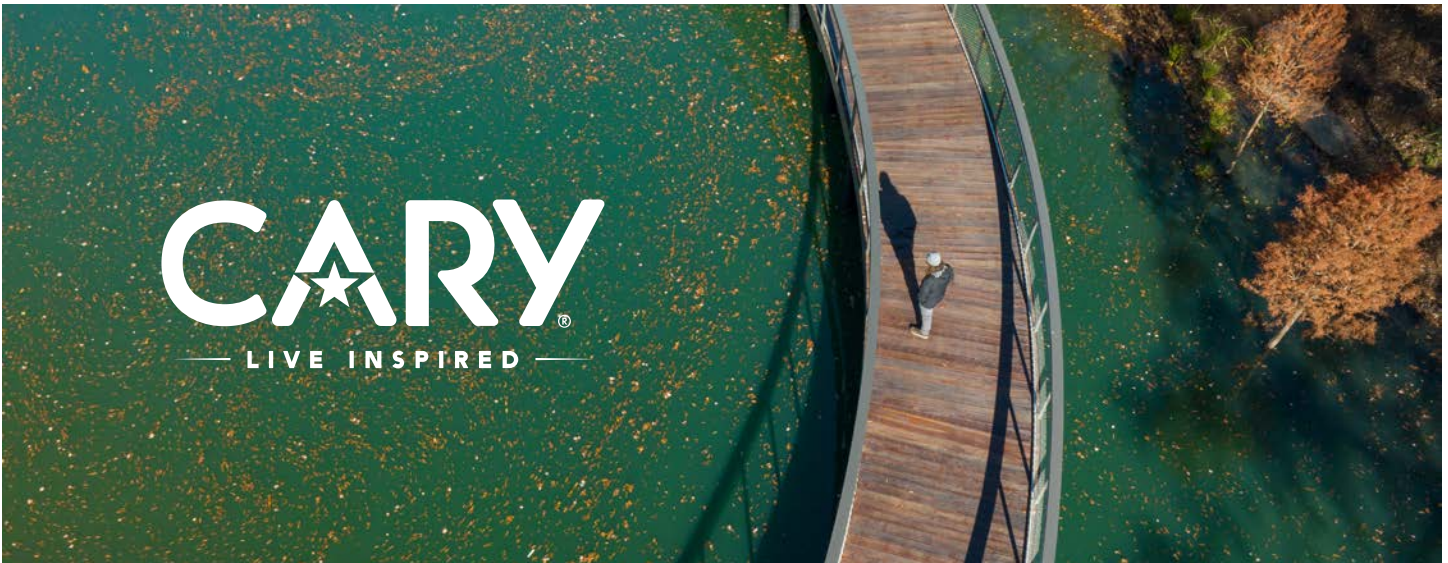
The Act chapter provides a summary table of the policy initiatives and a list of 95 actions found in each chapter. Since adoption, 61, or 64%, of those actions are active or complete, with 34, or 36%, not yet started. Implementation of the plan is documented through the Council's annual and quarterly reports.

Imagine Cary originally prescribed timeframes for minor and major updates. However, the current process highlights the importance of being nimble in our ability to update the plan. Some chapters will require updates based on new information or subplans, while other sections will remain very relevant throughout the entire planning horizon. It is anticipated that future updates for the Imagine Cary Community Plan will continue to occur in a similar as-needed manner, rather than the prescriptive approach originally envisioned.

This update focuses specifically on a new Preface and the LIVE, ENRICH, AND SERVE chapters. Other chapters will be amended as new plans and initiatives come forward and as wholistic reviews and updates of the chapters are needed.

This updated version of Imagine Cary builds upon the strong foundation established in 2017 while incorporating new insights and addressing contemporary challenges.





WHAT'S CHANGED

Since the adoption of the Imagine Cary Community Plan, Cary has remained a premier community, using the vision and policies of Imagine Cary to stay at the top of the arc. However, like the rest of the world around us, Cary must continue to evolve.

Cary's internal culture has focused on becoming "the local government that doesn't exist." We push ourselves to improve and challenge convention on how local governments should operate. We have embraced the adaptive leadership philosophy of Harvard Business School's Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky. This has enabled us to design effective teams led by individuals rather than hierarchical structures to promote meaningful and lasting change. Cary continues to build on its legacy of excellence, innovation, and exceptional service by empowering staff to solve problems of the future with forward-thinking collaboration.

On Jan. 20, 2020, the world changed dramatically when the first COVID-19 case in the United States was reported in Washington. Cary would confirm its first case on Mar. 3.

The pandemic had a profound impact on our community, altering our priorities and requiring us to adapt swiftly to new circumstances. Throughout the pandemic, we balanced the continuation of expected services with the safety of our citizens and staff.

When we created Imagine Cary, we knew we would need to remain adaptive and nimble to succeed in a world where technologies and expectations were rapidly changing. We knew something would test us – as an organization, as a city, and as a country – but we didn't know how. And we didn't know it would be so soon.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a unique set of challenges, including closing facilities, maintaining service levels while allowing for social distancing, and creating protocols to keep our employees and citizens safe as we reopened.

Yet, in the face of unprecedented challenges, the organization and Imagine Cary have demonstrated their resilience and adaptability. Never has it been more imperative that our plans remain relevant in an ever-changing landscape.

Much of the vision of Imagine Cary is centered around the idea that Cary is redeveloping and that there will be an increase in development intensity in certain identified areas. Since adoption, this idea has become a reality with the development of places like Fenton, approvals in Alston close to Research Triangle Park, and of course the evolution of Cary's downtown. With the recent opening of Downtown Cary Park, there continues to be strong momentum in not only downtown but in all our destination centers.

Cary's branding and marketing initiatives are essential to actualizing the Imagine Cary plan, keeping Cary competitive in a world that is constantly evolving in complex and unpredictable ways. Shortly after Imagine Cary was adopted, Cary unveiled and implemented a new logo and "Live Inspired" tagline. This new, more modern Cary brand provides a solid ground for our expanded marketing efforts, which have strategically increased in markets outside of North Carolina. By targeting key regional, national, and international audiences with a focus on economic development, we're attracting new opportunities for jobs, investments, and high-profile events. These efforts keep

Cary “at the top of the arc” and strengthen our reputation as a vibrant, diverse, and prosperous community for businesses, visitors, and residents alike.

As we revisit the Imagine Cary Community Plan, we recognize the need to integrate new insights and address emerging challenges that have shaped our community since the plan’s initial release in 2017.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Imagine Cary describes how our tax base will grow at a slower rate, and that we will not be able to rely solely on new development to fund our financial future. The pandemic and changes in consumer preferences further impacted the housing market and spending patterns. As a result, we will continue to need to modify how we manage our financial resources as changes to our revenue streams occur.

The high rate of growth that Cary has experienced over the last 30 years has enabled us to provide high levels of service while maintaining low property tax rates. This service model was achievable with a tax base fueled by years of greenfield development. The Imagine Cary Community Plan acknowledges our transition to a maturing municipality whose tax base growth will be driven at a less robust pace by redevelopment. In turn, Cary’s financial planning will need to include revenue generation models that rely more on tax rate growth if service level expectations, infrastructure maintenance and the addition of new facilities and infrastructure are to be achieved.

Since 2017, the environmental sustainability of our community continues to be increasingly important. The world around us is experiencing significant shifts due to climate change, resource depletion, and other ecological concerns. As stewards of our finite resources, it is imperative that we proactively incorporate sustainable practices into our vision for Cary’s future.

In 2017, Cary included policies related to the environment within Imagine Cary. But in response to the heightened emphasis on the environment, and for added clarity, it is important that we highlight these policies to create an overarching picture of our environmental sustainability goals.

Cary has become a leader in looking at what we can do now to curb our environmental impact and expand our commitments in the future. This includes going beyond education by implementing several processes to reduce our resource consumption. Over the

past several years, we have become a regional leader in solar production, food waste composting, water management, and tree canopy documentation. Through this initial work, Cary will evolve our current practices to continue to reduce consumption and understand our impact on the community.

Almost everything Cary does impacts the environment in some way. In 2023, Cary launched the “Count Me In, Cary!” campaign to develop stewardship strategies for a sustainable future. The campaign explores the impacts of climate change, identifies challenges and opportunities, and provides solutions that work for our communities. This campaign was designed to understand citizen perspectives on our environmental practices. Over 4,000 voices contributed to “Count me in, Cary!,” and this input is incorporated into a new chapter of this plan focusing specifically on the environment.

INTERIM UPDATES TO THE PLAN

The interim update to the Imagine Cary Community Plan includes a new chapter called Enrich, which focuses on priorities and direction related to the environment. This update reaffirms our commitment to environmental sustainability. By prioritizing environmental sustainability, we ensure a healthier, more resilient, and more vibrant future for our residents.

Updates to the Serve chapter ensure it accurately captures the many services Cary provides, including those less visible to the public. Much of the written content focusing on the environment in the existing Serve chapter continues to be pertinent and will move to the Enrich chapter.

From time to time, new plans will be adopted by Council and incorporated into the Imagine Cary Community Plan. Cary’s Housing Plan, adopted in 2021, is incorporated into this update. Other plans such as the Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources Master Plan; Open Space Plan; Bike Plan; and Urban Forestry Master Plan are in various stages of creation and will be incorporated following approval by Council.

As we update the Imagine Cary Community Plan, we have considered the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, placing a renewed emphasis on flexibility and resilience. We are prepared to increase our impact in the region and tackle challenges head-on, finding innovative solutions that meet the needs of today while also considering the needs of future generations.