

# ROANOKE *VISION*

COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR ROANOKE,  
VIRGINIA 1985-2005



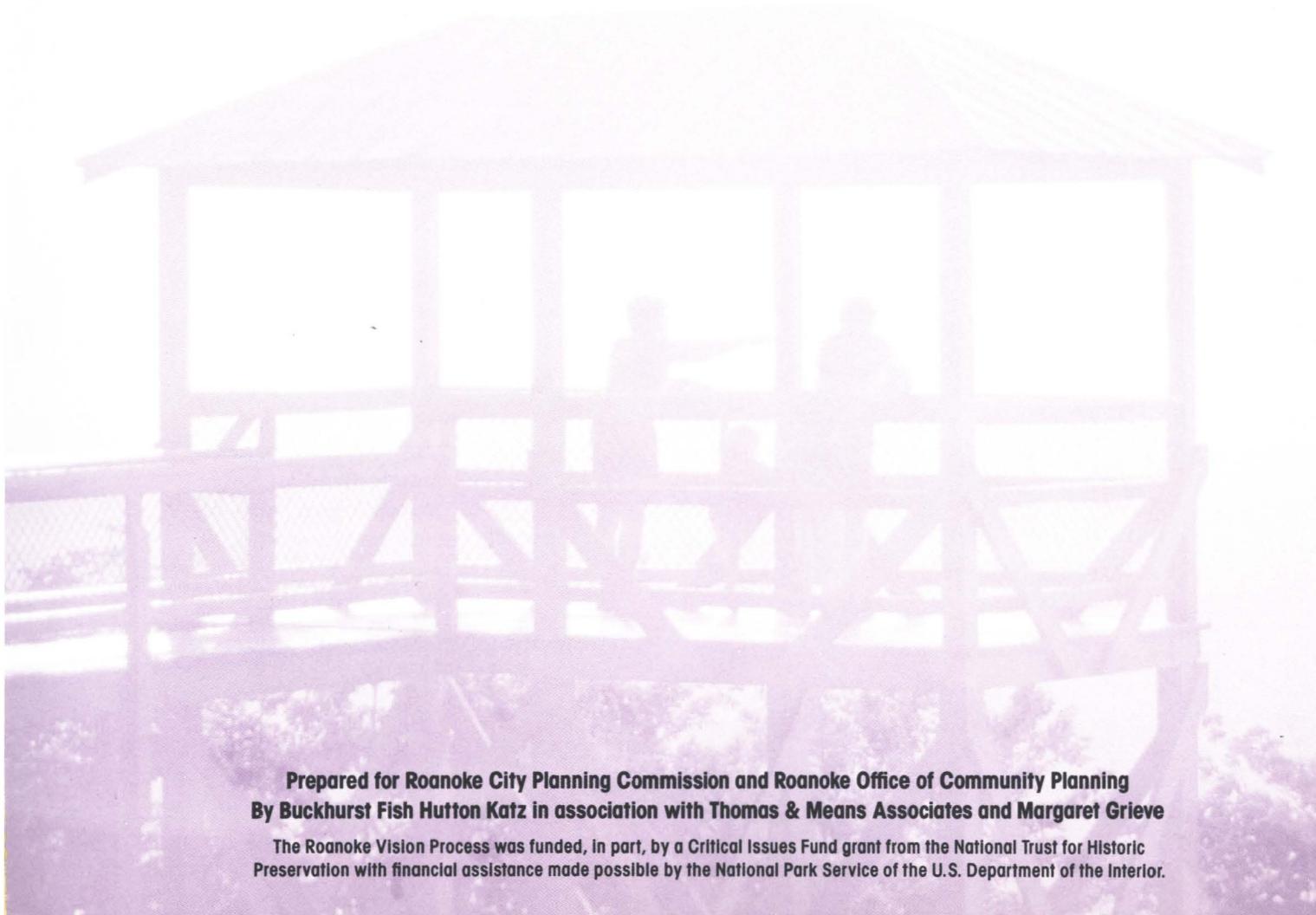
**ZONING COMMISSION**  
District of Columbia

Case No. 86-26  
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# ROANOKE *VISION*

ZONING COMMISSION  
Date of 1985  
Case... 86-26  
Exhibit... 527

COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR ROANOKE,  
VIRGINIA 1985-2005



Prepared for Roanoke City Planning Commission and Roanoke Office of Community Planning  
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# Table of Contents



<b>1</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	5
<b>2</b>	<b>ROANOKE VISION PROCESS</b>	19
	<i>The Planning Process</i>	20
	<i>Citizen Concerns, Goals and Community Values</i>	22
<b>3</b>	<b>ROANOKE YESTERDAY</b>	27
	<i>Planning and Development Legacy</i>	28
<b>4</b>	<b>ROANOKE TOMORROW</b>	30
	<i>Context and Approach</i>	31
	<i>Roanoke: Center of a Dynamic Region</i>	31
	<i>Roanoke as a Maturing City</i>	31
	<i>The Planning Approach: A City of Neighborhoods</i>	35
	<i>Comprehensive Development Plan Elements: A Strategy for Planning and Development Actions</i>	41
	<i>Housing</i>	42
	<i>Commercial Development</i>	48
	<i>Industrial Development</i>	54
	<i>Historic and Cultural Resources</i>	57
	<i>Human Development and Public Safety</i>	60
	<i>Parks and Recreation</i>	66
	<i>Transportation</i>	69
	<i>Utilities</i>	74
	<i>Environmental Quality</i>	78
	<i>Roanoke Tomorrow: The Comprehensive Development Plan</i>	81
<b>5</b>	<b>ACHIEVING THE VISION</b>	88
	<i>Actions for the Next Five Years</i>	89
	<i>Revised Land Development Regulations</i>	91
	<i>Improved Administrative Procedures</i>	93
	<i>A Partnership Approach</i>	97
	<i>Planning and Development Actions</i>	98
<b>6</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	100
	<i>A Strategy to Avoid Missed Opportunities</i>	101



## *List of Figures*

<i>City of Roanoke: Orientation Map</i>	10
<i>Plan Update &amp; Revision</i>	17
<i>Detailed Planning &amp; Implementation</i>	18
<i>The Roanoke Vision Schedule</i>	21
<i>Local Context: Roanoke Valley Metropolitan Area (SMSA)</i>	32
<i>Neighborhoods</i>	37
<i>Future Growth and Development Strategies for Neighborhoods</i>	39
<i>Housing Development Strategy</i>	43
<i>Commercial Development Strategy</i>	49
<i>Industrial Development Strategy</i>	55
<i>Historical and Cultural Resource Strategy</i>	58
<i>Social and Health Services Strategy</i>	62
<i>Parks and Recreation Strategy</i>	67
<i>Transportation Strategy</i>	70
<i>Utilities Strategy</i>	75
<i>Environmental Quality Strategy</i>	79
<i>The Roanoke Comprehensive Development Plan</i>	
<i>In Context of Other Regional Plans</i>	82
<i>Existing Land Use</i>	84
<i>Comprehensive Development Plan: Action Strategy</i>	85
<i>Five Year Action Schedule</i>	90
<i>Proposed Administration of Comprehensive Plan</i>	94
<i>Proposed Administration of Land Development Regulations</i>	96
<i>Detailed Planning and Implementation</i>	99

# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



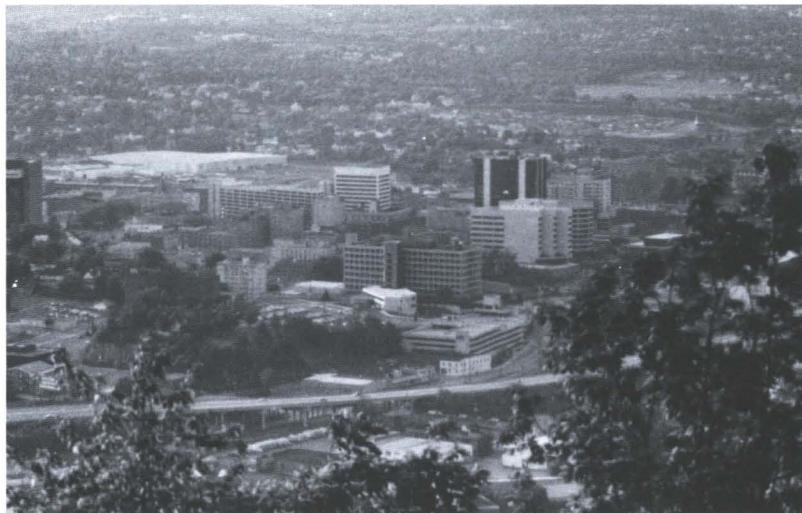
Left: The Mill Mountain star has symbolized Roanoke since 1949.

**T**he Comprehensive Development Plan provides a new approach to guide Roanoke's continued revitalization and growth. The Plan begins by recognizing the impressive gains Roanoke has made in the past decade. Downtown and neighborhood revitalization have brought dramatic change to the city's physical character and to Roanoke's attitude about its own identity and potential. Economic growth and job creation, fueled by significant industrial and commercial developments, have made Roanoke a more competitive regional center. Strong political leadership, coupled with professional municipal management, has improved the quality of a wide variety of public facilities and services while lowering the city's tax rate. Today, Roanokers sense the excitement of living in a dynamic city, yet value the historic structures, traditional values, natural beauty and comfortable pace that have long defined the city's character.

### A ROANOKE VISION: 2005

But what about the future? In twenty years, what kind of community do Roanokers want their city to be?

Right: View of downtown Roanoke from Mill Mountain.



In keeping with the City's tradition of civic involvement in planning, the Roanoke Vision Planning Team took this question to the citizens of Roanoke. Through a broad-based public participation process, including a public opinion survey, television special and a series of planning workshops and community meetings, a growing vision about Roanoke's future emerged:

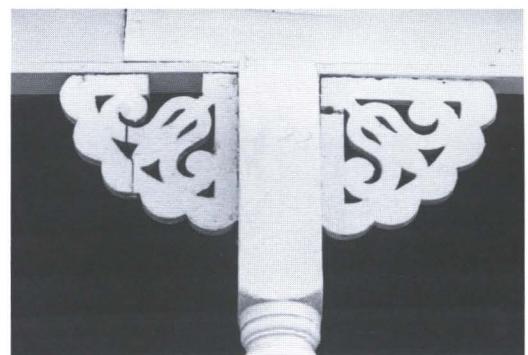
***Roanoke should be a city of neighborhoods.***

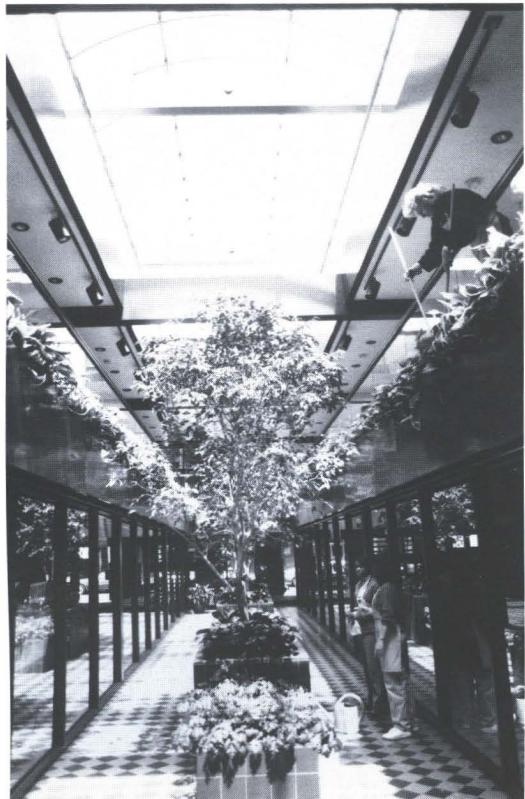
The preservation and enhancement of the city's existing neighborhood fabric — its attractive homes, tree-lined streets, neighborhood commercial districts and local employment sites — should be firmly established. New land development ordinances, such as an innovative neighborhood conservation zone, should be adopted to help achieve preservation goals. Equally important are participatory planning efforts and new public and private implementation vehicles, such as a privately-initiated, non-profit housing development corporation, which should be supported to further needed housing revitalization efforts. Continued improvements in the educational facilities and programs of the City schools should draw families to city neighborhoods. Neighborhoods should also be strong social communities where everyone from children to the elderly can thrive. Human services designed to promote self-sufficiency should support this goal. Every neighborhood in the city should be an active participant in determining its own — and therefore Roanoke's — future.

***Roanoke's appearance and environmental quality should enhance the city's image for residents and visitors.***

Roanoke should be a more beautiful city — a city of trees. Landscaped, well-lighted boulevards should

Below: Typical "Carpenter Gothic" found in Roanoke's older neighborhoods.





Above: One of several revitalized downtown areas.

lead from regional highways to attractive neighborhoods and a pedestrian-scaled downtown. New and renovated housing units should capture the flavor and best qualities of their historic and architectural context. Revised land development regulations which encourage improved design quality and landscaping should ensure that new employment developments are good neighbors to adjacent uses. New construction should have a healthy respect for natural features, avoiding flood plains or steep slopes. Development and landscaping of a scenic river parkway should be considered in conjunction with flood control improvements to share costs and provide increased environmental benefits.

***Roanoke's continuing economic development should be pursued as crucial to neighborhood health as well as to regional growth.***

Roanoke's employment base should continue to be expanded through active economic development efforts. Successfully marketing Roanoke as a vital economic center — a part of the "southeast urban region," which also contains the Raleigh, Charlotte, Atlanta, and Nashville areas — is critical to the region's continuing growth. Equally important is the value of economic development to ongoing neighborhood revitalization. Attractive and well-planned nearby job sites can be positive tools for residential marketing, leveraging housing assistance, providing job training and promoting self-sufficiency.

***Roanoke and its downtown should serve as a dynamic center for the region.***

An emphasis not only on office, industrial and retail development, but also on tourism will increase Roanoke's importance as a vibrant center for the Roanoke Valley metropolitan area and the western Vir-

ginia region. An improved airport, a river parkway, a new convention center, additional hotel space, attractive downtown housing, a relocated transportation museum, continued development of Center in the Square, and new theaters and restaurants near the City Market and Henry Street are all features that can be attractions for local residents and regional or national visitors. Regional cooperation in planning the services and infrastructure to support these facilities is essential. Equally important is City support for other regional institutions and programs, such as expanded higher education opportunities in cooperation with area colleges and universities or the development of major tourist destination attractions such as the proposed Explore Project's new zoological park.

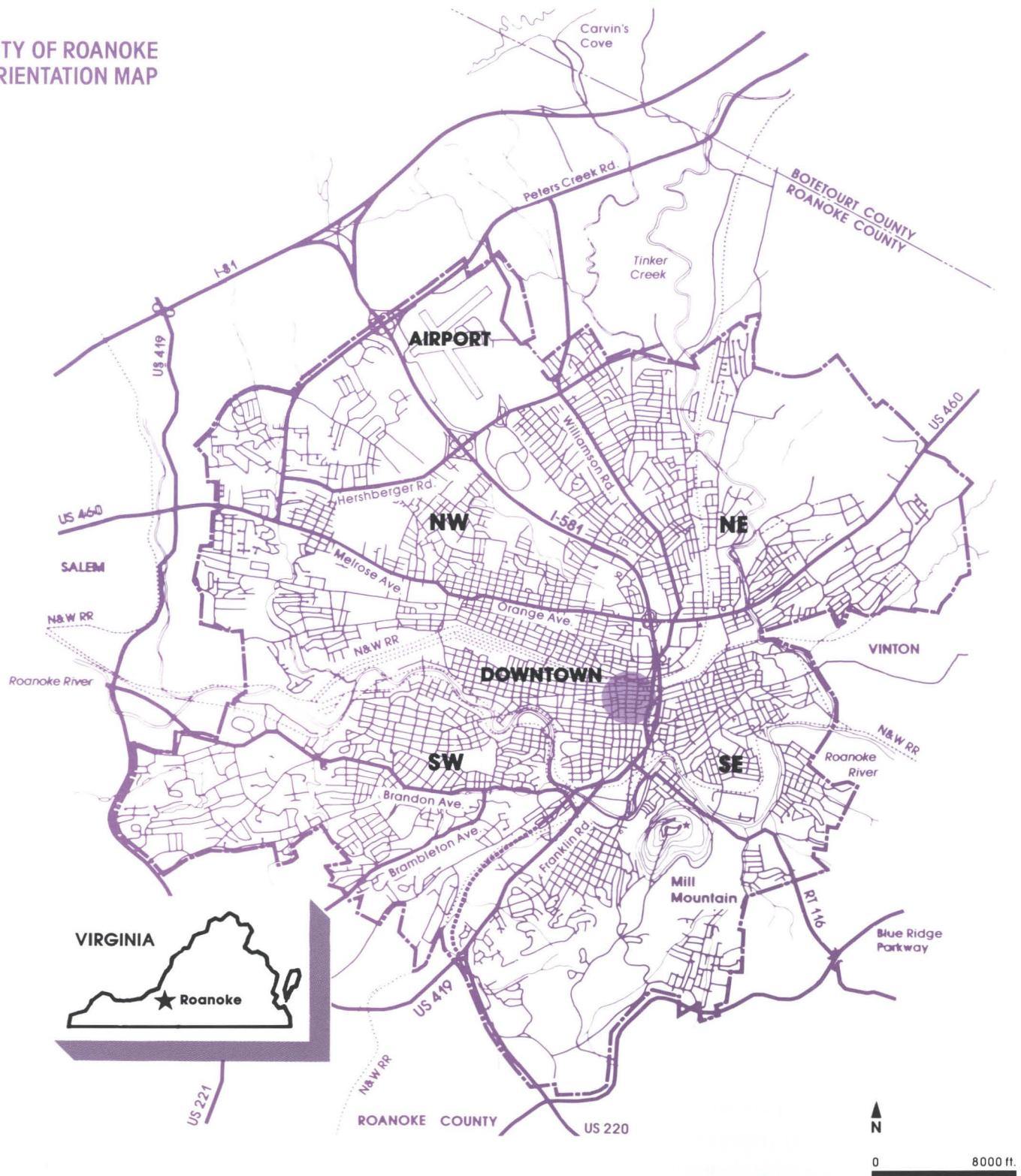
Roanoke's citizens see an exciting future for their city. To achieve this vision, the recommendations of the Comprehensive Development Plan attempt to balance new approaches for housing, human service, economic development and public service and facility needs with continuing efforts to maintain and enhance the city's existing assets.

Implementation of the Plan will require cooperation. Leaders from local government, the business community, the volunteer sector and neighborhood organizations must keep working together to find even more opportunities for the creative human and financial investments that have characterized the city's recent revitalization and development. The central focus of the Roanoke Vision Comprehensive Development Plan is to provide a common framework for these ongoing partnership efforts: the strategic planning, regulatory and development actions needed to help Roanoke reach its full potential as both a vital regional center and a comfortable hometown community.



*Above: Small commercial buildings of an American main street character create an image for downtown.*

CITY OF ROANOKE  
ORIENTATION MAP



## SUMMARY OF MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to implement these long-term approaches, the Comprehensive Development Plan proposes four priority areas for action over the next five years and beyond:

- Revised Land Development Regulations
- Improved Administrative Procedures
- Partnership Approaches
- Planning and Development Actions

The following summary highlights the major recommendations in each category. For a more detailed discussion of these proposals, please see the appropriate sections of the Plan.

### ***Revised Land Development Regulations***

Revised land development regulations including zoning, site plan and subdivision ordinances are essential to successful implementation of the Comprehensive Development Plan. The following regulatory recommendations should be enacted:

- Revised zoning and related regulations should promote neighborhood conservation and preservation of historically significant structures, facilitate development of “infill” or vacant lots in existing neighborhoods, and expand the possibilities for downtown housing in renovated or new structures.
- Improved site plan controls and design guidelines should encourage quality new construction and renovation sensitive to existing neighborhood character.
- Revised land development regulations should provide a wider variety of new housing choices through more innovative site planning techniques.
- Revised zoning and related regulations should improve the quality of commercial and industrial



Above: A street in a Northwest neighborhood undergoing revitalization.



**Above:** Well-maintained homes in the Southwest Historic District.

development and minimize impacts on adjacent residential uses.

- A new zoning classification for neighborhood commercial centers should ensure appropriate, small-scale development of needed neighborhood services.
- Revised zoning regulations should facilitate the provision of essential community-based human service programs and facilities.
- Continued enforcement should be provided of the City's existing regulations limiting run-off and new efforts should be made to establish Valley-wide storm water standards through cooperation with other area jurisdictions.

#### ***Improved Administrative Procedures***

Improved coordination of all ongoing municipal planning functions is an important element in achieving the strategic planning and comprehensive development actions called for in this plan. A streamlined development approvals process including increased staff support to land development regulatory bodies is also critical. Key administrative proposals include:

- Strengthen Roanoke City Planning Commission's role in directing ongoing comprehensive planning for the city.
- Improve coordination of all strategic and comprehensive planning by developing stronger relationships and more formal lines of responsibility between the City's Office of Community Planning and all municipal departments and related agencies with planning functions.
- Provide a "one-stop" source of land development information, response and program assistance for the public within the Office of Community Planning.



Right: The original Municipal Building erected in 1915 and currently undergoing renovation to meet public service needs today.

Develop a central computerized land use mapping and data base as part of this effort.

- Organize coordinated development review and staff reporting procedures for the Roanoke City Planning Commission, Architectural Review Board and Board of Zoning Appeals within the Office of Community Planning.
- Ensure maximum possible enforcement of all land development regulations including housing and property maintenance codes through appropriate City departments.

#### ***Partnership Approaches***

- Continue successful public/private/neighborhood partnership efforts in planning and development actions.
- Support new private non-profit development entities for housing and commercial revitalization.
- Support neighborhood civic and business associations.
- Actively involve neighborhood residents in detailed planning to develop action strategies for each neighborhood.



Above: Citizen workshop during the Roanoke Vision planning process.

### ***Planning And Development Actions***

The Plan's key planning and development action recommendations include:

#### ***Housing***

- Develop public/private housing strategy plan to establish methods, schedule and financing approaches to upgrade quality of substandard housing units and address other housing needs.
- Initiate and support a non-profit housing development corporation to carry out housing rehabilitation efforts and develop models for new residential uses such as downtown housing.

#### ***Economic Development***

- Continue active efforts to expand Roanoke's employment base.
- Support continued downtown development as a center for office, government and supporting retail services.
- Support the development of tourist destination attractions and supporting services.
- Prepare neighborhood commercial plan to identify areas lacking essential commercial services, existing centers in need of revitalization and sites for new centers.
- Encourage industrial development on appropriate sites and complete public access and infrastructure improvements to these developments as needed.

#### ***Historic and Cultural Resources***

- Prepare detailed historic and cultural inventory plan to develop expanded strategies and programs to promote preservation of historic structures and neighborhood character.

### ***Human Development***

- Support continued improvement of public school facilities and programs including policy of maintaining neighborhood schools through renovation of older facilities and paired school administrations.
- Support efforts to expand job training, graduate and other higher education facilities and programs in Roanoke.
- Prepare detailed human resources plan for human service and facility needs through cooperation with public and private service providers and neighborhood residents.
- Support the development of neighborhood-based, multi-purpose human service centers.
- Support increased youth activity, service and day care programs through both new public and private efforts and better coordination and use of existing facilities and programs.

### ***Parks and Recreation***

- Update Parks Master Plan to identify priority park development and improvement projects.
- Develop a greenway system along the Roanoke River and major streams to provide both a continuous open space with bikeways and pedestrian paths and enhanced flood control.
- Provide expanded recreation programs with special emphasis on youth programs in neighborhood areas with a high need for youth services.

### ***Transportation***

- Participate in revision of Roanoke Valley Area Transportation Plan and prepare City Thoroughfare Plan.



*Above: Downtown workers at lunch in the City Market area.*

- Implement selected street improvements, new roads and interchanges.
- Support continued airport improvements.
- Improve Roanoke's image through aesthetic, landscaping and traffic improvements on major entry roads into city and downtown.
- Prepare a traffic management plan with special emphasis on downtown circulation and parking.

#### ***Utilities***

- Cooperate with area jurisdictions to develop a regional storm drainage plan and implement improvements identified for city.
- Participate in the development of a regional water supply plan.
- Resolve future regional facility needs for waste water treatment and solid waste disposal.

#### ***Environmental Quality***

- Implement appropriate flood control measures and minimize development in the flood plain or flood prone areas.
- Develop open space conservation areas to protect natural resources and sensitive land.
- Enhance city's visual quality through an expanded tree planting program for residential and commercial areas.

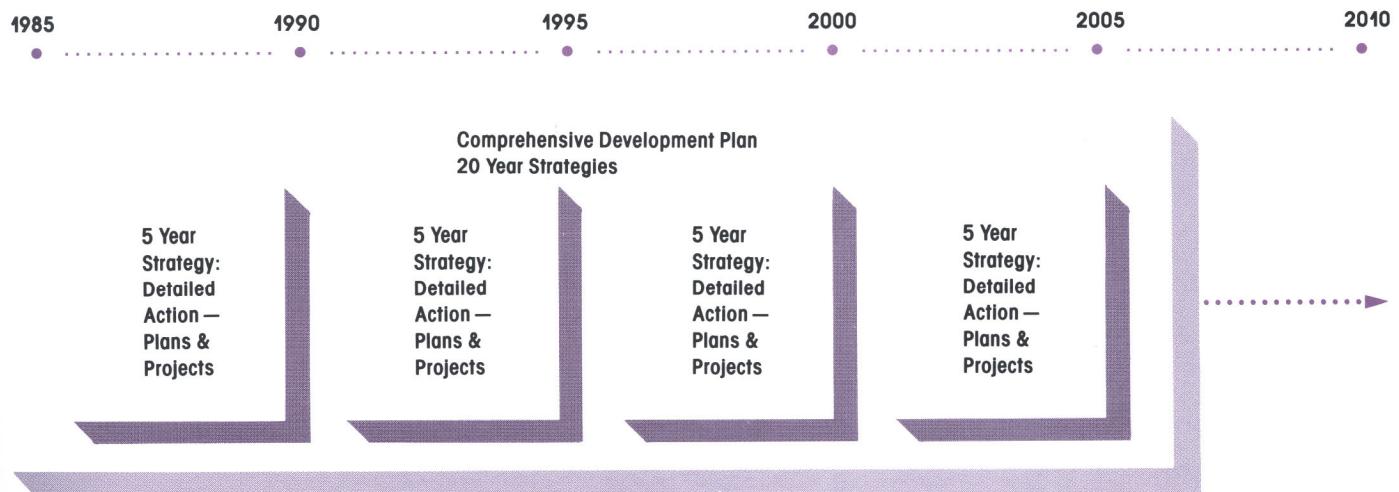
**Below: The public forum which initiated the Roanoke Vision planning process.**



## **THE ROANOKE VISION PROCESS**

Through the Roanoke Vision planning process, Roanoke's citizens joined in the tasks of examining the city's various land use and service components – from residential to human development. In addition to developing specific recommendations for each component, the impacts of actions in one component

## PLAN UPDATE & REVISION



were evaluated in relation to others including the interrelationships among a variety of neighborhood revitalization, economic development, public infrastructure, and human services efforts.

The Comprehensive Development Plan itself incorporates both long-term (20 year) projections and strategies for Roanoke's future, as well as a short-term (5 year) set of proposed planning and development actions. The Plan's assumptions and conclusions should be reviewed every five years, while the shorter-term actions should be refined and updated yearly.

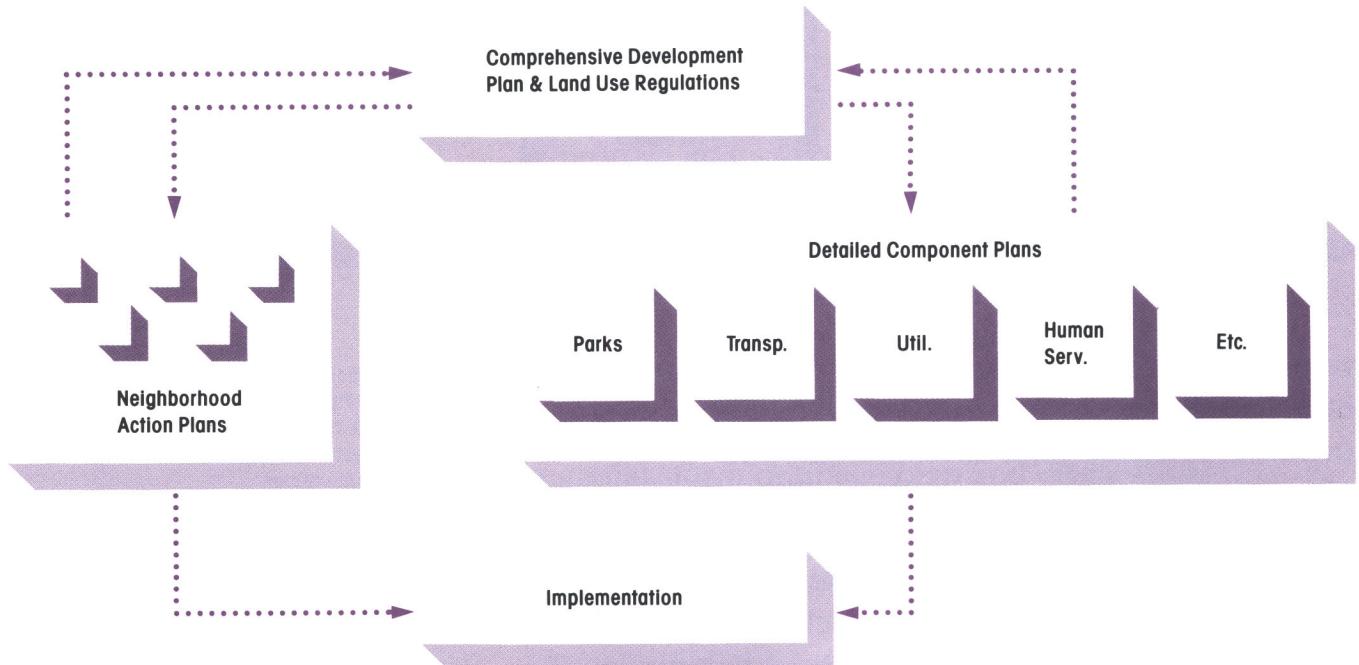
The larger Roanoke Vision planning process should become a continuing planning and development program for the City under the direction of the Roanoke City Planning Commission. Development actions must always be preceded by continually-refined plans and a continually-expanding set of participants. Based on the Comprehensive Development Plan's framework, the Planning Commission should initiate two parallel sets of planning activities to be coordinated by the Office of Community Planning and carried out by appropriate City departments and public agencies. These ongoing planning efforts include:

### ***Neighborhood Action Plans:***

Detailed neighborhood planning with local residents should be based on Comprehensive Development

Above: The Roanoke Vision Comprehensive Plan established a land use framework for the next 20 years and a development/revitalization action strategy for the next five years. Detailed action strategies will then be developed in subsequent 5 year increments.

## DETAILED PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION



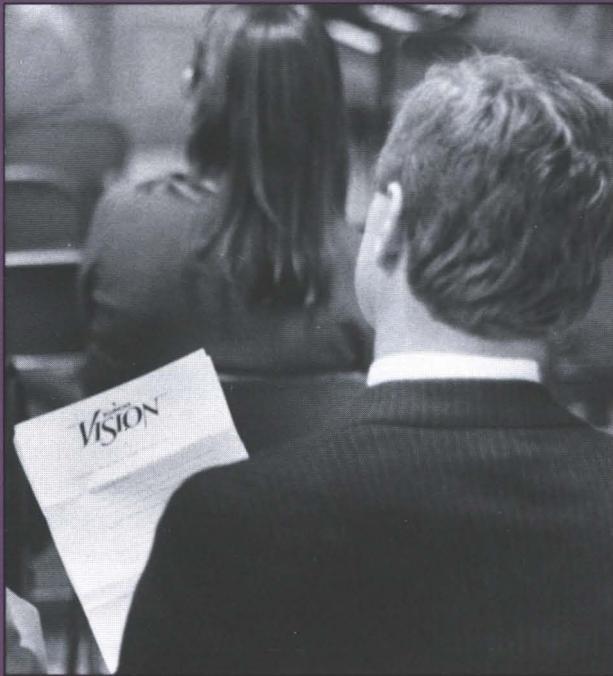
Above: The Comprehensive Development Plan coordinates the activities of the various city departments responsible for land use, capital improvements and physical development programs. It also directs the detailed action planning for individual neighborhoods and other special districts.

Plan analysis and should include additional data gathering, issue identification, and definition of action projects. Neighborhood plans should focus on both existing development (maintaining good qualities, improving problem areas, or changing seriously deteriorated conditions) as well as new development (how to achieve both optimum location and quality design of new land uses).

### ***Detailed Component plans:***

Detailed strategies for specific subjects such as housing, human services, or storm water management should also be developed. Based on the values and recommendations of the Comprehensive Development Plan, these plans should focus on specific actions and resources. Project scheduling, phasing, and budgeting should also be established. Task forces to advise on component plans should include, as required, public and private sector participants.

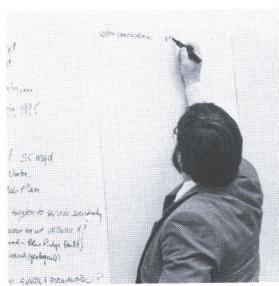
## 2 ROANOKE VISION PROCESS



Through citizen participation in the planning process, a common vision emerged about the kind of city Roanokers want their community to be.



## The Planning Process



**Top:** Planning Commission Chairwoman Susan Goode at the Vision Forum. **Above:** Citizen values, ideas, and concerns were recorded at Vision workshops.

The Roanoke Vision planning process involved two parallel work efforts:

- a public participation element composed of workshops, media and public surveys designed to inform and solicit the ideas of Roanoke Valley citizens, and
- a technical planning element through which the Roanoke Vision Planning Team and City staff collected and analyzed background data needed to form planning and development recommendations.

### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The public participation process was based on the premise that when planning begins with good communication — a lively exchange of information and ideas — it will result in effective actions with broad support. Communication elements of the Roanoke Vision Process included:

#### ***Roanoke Vision Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee and Ordinance Review Committee***

The City Council-appointed Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee and the citizen-based Ordinance Review Committee played key roles in developing the Comprehensive Development Plan and related land use regulations. Both committees contained representatives from the City's development-related boards and commissions and neighborhood organizations. Because of its technical focus, the Ordinance Review Committee also contained representatives from the business, construction and engineering sectors of the community.

#### ***Roanoke Vision TV Special***

This prime time television special, produced by the Roanoke Vision Planning

Team and broadcast by the NBC affiliate, WSLs TV-10, highlighted the history of planning in Roanoke and the problems and opportunities Roanoke now faces.

#### ***Roanoke Vision Survey***

The Roanoke Vision Survey, published as a supplement to the *Roanoke Times and World News*, reached over 165,000 Roanoke Valley households. In addition to providing background information on Roanoke's rich planning legacy as well as current issues facing the city, the Survey provided citizens with an opportunity to register their opinions on a range of planning and development activities. Young people were also invited to respond through a "Dreams for Roanoke" contest.

#### ***Roanoke Vision Forum***

This public town meeting brought together over 200 invited civic, business, neighborhood and government leaders to discuss key ingredients in Roanoke's quality of life and the issues the city faces in its continued revitalization and growth.

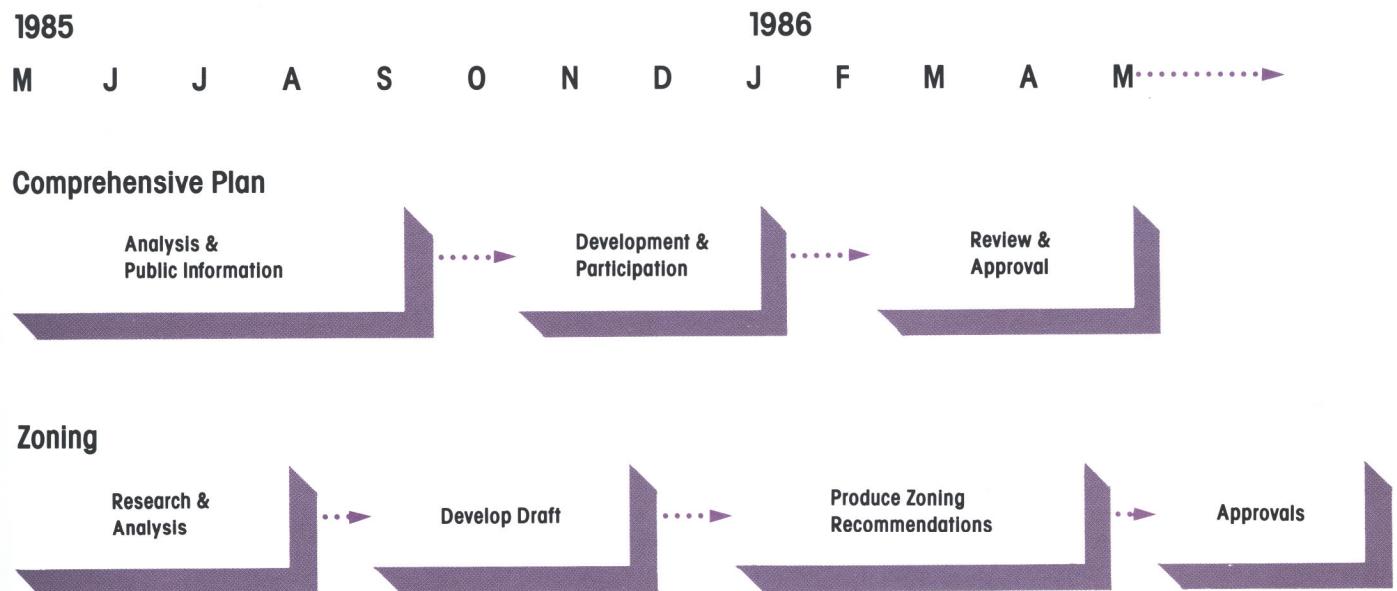
#### ***Planning Workshops***

Through a series of three planning workshops, a representative group of citizens developed a comprehensive set of community values to guide the Plan's development, provided information on specific neighborhood and city-wide issues, and reviewed preliminary Comprehensive Development Plan concepts.

#### ***Community and Civic Meetings***

The Roanoke Vision Planning Team met with key public boards and commissions, professional organizations and civic and neighborhood groups to solicit their ideas and to explain the issues being addressed in the Comprehensive Development Plan and related land use regulations.

## ROANOKE VISION SCHEDULE



## TECHNICAL PLANNING

The Roanoke Vision Planning Team conducted professional evaluations and developed planning recommendations in parallel with the public participation aspects of the planning process.

### *Analysis of Existing Conditions*

In conjunction with City administrators and staff, the Planning Team examined demographic and economic data, investigated land use and zoning conflicts, evaluated local and regional issues and listened to citizen concerns. As background for this work, a group of citizen investigators prepared a comprehensive land use inventory of the city, the first such update in over 10 years. A review of existing City departmental planning efforts as well as current projects and program actions was also a major part of this effort. A detailed description of this work is contained in a supplemental report, *Roanoke Today: An Analysis of Existing Conditions*.

## *Analysis of Components and Preparation of Final Comprehensive Development Plan*

The Planning Team analyzed and prepared recommendations for major components of Roanoke's land use and infrastructure, testing each in terms of its relationship to the others, and synthesizing them into a final composite plan and policy recommendations.

Concurrent work focused on land development regulations as a major implementation tool for Roanoke Vision values and recommendations.

Above: The Vision Process included a coordinated series of both public and technical activities to achieve a comprehensive plan and revised zoning ordinance.