

Rural Definitions

1. A Planner's Dictionary

rural : A sparsely developed area where the land is primarily used for farming, forestry, resource extraction, very low-density residential uses (one unit per 10 acres or less), or open space uses. (Renton, Wash.)

2. State of Maine, Chapter 208, Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria Rule:

Rural area. "Rural area" means a geographic area that is identified and designated in a community's comprehensive plan as an area that is deserving of some level of regulatory protection from unrestricted development for purposes that may include, but are not limited to, supporting agriculture, forestry, mining, open space, wildlife habitat, fisheries habitat, and scenic lands, and away from which most development projected over 10 years is diverted.

[State of Maine, Chapter 208, Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria Rule: Q. Growth area: "Growth area" means an area that is designated in a community's comprehensive plan as suitable for orderly residential, commercial, or industrial development, or any combinations of those types of development and related infrastructure, and into which most development projected over 10 years is directed.]

3. Wikipedia:

Rural areas: large and isolated areas of an open country with low [population](#) density. The terms "countryside" and "rural areas" are not synonyms: a "countryside" refers to rural areas that are open. Forest, wetlands, and other areas with a low population density are not a countryside.

About 91 percent of the rural population^[where?] now earn salaried incomes, often in [urban areas](#). The 10 percent who still produce resources generate 20 percent of the world's [coal](#), [copper](#), and [oil](#); 10 percent of its wheat, 20 percent of its meat, and 50 percent of its corn. The efficiency of these farms is due in large part to the commercialization of the farming industry, and not single family operations.^[1]

80 percent [United States'](#) inhabitants live in [suburban](#) and [urban areas](#), but cities occupy only 10 percent of the country. Rural areas occupy the remaining 90 percent.^[1]The [U.S. Census Bureau](#), the [USDA's Economic Research Service](#), and the [Office of Management and Budget](#) (OMB) have come together to help define rural areas.; United States Census Bureau: The Census Bureau definitions (new to

the 2000 census), which are based on population density, defines rural areas as all territory outside of Census Bureau-defined urbanized areas and urban clusters.*An urbanized area consists of a central city and surrounding areas whose population ("urban nucleus") is greater than 50,000. They may or may not contain individual cities with 50,000 or more; rather, they must have a core with a population density generally exceeding 1,000 persons per square mile; and may contain adjoining territory with at least 500 persons per square mile (other towns outside of an urbanized area whose population exceeds 2,500).*Thus, rural areas comprise open country and settlements with fewer than 2,500 residents; areas designated as rural can have population densities as high as 999 per square mile or as low as 1 person per square mile.[2];USDA:* The USDA's [Office of Rural Development](#) may define rural by various population thresholds. The [2002 farm bill](#) (P.L. 107-171, Sec. 6020) defined rural and rural area as any area other than (1) a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants, and (2) the urbanized areas contiguous and adjacent to such a city or town.* The rural-urban continuum codes, urban influence codes, and rural county typology codes developed by USDA's [Economic Research Service](#) (ERS) allow researchers to break out the standard metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas into smaller residential groups.[2] For example, a metropolitan county is one that contains an urbanized area, or one that has a twenty-five percent commuter rate to an urbanized area regardless of population.;OMB: Under the Core Based Statistical Areas used by the OMB,::* a metropolitan county, or [Metropolitan Statistical Area](#), consists of (1) central counties with one or more urbanized areas (as defined by the [Census Bureau](#)) and (2) outlying counties that are economically tied to the core counties as measured by worker commuting data (i.e. if 25% of workers living there commute to the core counties, or if 25% of the employment in the county consists of workers coming from the central counties).::* Non-metro counties are outside the boundaries of metro areas and are further subdivided into [Micropolitan Statistical Areas](#) centered on urban clusters of 10,000-50,000 residents, and all remaining non-core counties.[2][3]

4. [Business Dictionary.com](#):

Sparsely populated area outside of the limits of a city or town or a designated commercial, industrial, or residential center. Rural areas are characterized by farms, vegetation, and open spaces.

5. [Wordiq.com](#):

Rural areas are sparsely settled places away from the influence of large cities and towns. Such areas are distinct from more intensively settled [urban](#) and [suburban](#) areas, and also from unsettled lands such as [outback](#) or [wilderness](#). People live in

[villages](#), on [farms](#) and in other isolated [houses](#).

Rural areas can have an agricultural character, though many rural areas are characterized by an economy based on logging, mining, oil and gas exploration, or tourism.

Lifestyles in rural areas are different than those in urban areas, mainly because limited services are available. Governmental services like law enforcement, schools, fire departments, and libraries may be distant, limited in scope, or unavailable. Utilities like water, sewer, street lighting, and garbage collection may not be present. [Public transport](#) is absent or very limited, people use their own [vehicles](#), [walk](#) or ride an [animal](#).

5. James City County, Williamsburg, Virginia:

Rural Lands are areas containing farms, forests and scattered houses, exclusively outside of the Primary Service Area, where a lower level of public service delivery exists or where utilities and urban services do not exist and are not planned for the future. Appropriate primary uses include agricultural and forestal activities, together with certain recreational and public or semi-public and institutional uses which may require a spacious site and which are compatible with the natural and rural surroundings. Rural residential uses associated with legitimate agricultural and forestal activities are appropriate when overall density is no more than one dwelling unit per three acres and soils are suitable for individual waste disposal systems. Residential developments not related to agricultural or forestal uses are only appropriate when they meet the Rural Lands Development Standards of the Comprehensive Plan and minimize adverse impacts on rural lands, in particular its rural character and the soils more suited for agriculture. Concentrations of residential development such as large-scale subdivisions will interrupt rural qualities sought to be preserved and significantly increase the demand for urban services and transportation facilities. Most retail and commercial uses which will serve Rural Lands will be located at planned commercial locations on major thoroughfares inside the PSA. However, a few of the smaller service uses and certain uses which require a specialized location may be located on the basis of a case-by-case review, provided such uses are compatible with the natural and rural character of the area, in accordance with the Development Standards of the Comprehensive Plan. These uses should be located in a manner that minimizes effects on agricultural and forestal activities, and located where public services and facilities, especially roads, can adequately accommodate them.

5. State of Washington Growth Management Act:

The following definition of rural character was included in the 1997 amendments to the GMA:

"....Rural character refers to the patterns of land use and development established by a county in the rural element of its comprehensive plan:

(a) In which open space, the natural landscape, and vegetation predominate over the built environment; (b) That foster traditional rural lifestyles, rural-based economies, and opportunities to both live and work in rural areas; (c) That provide visual landscapes that are traditionally found in rural areas and communities; (d) That are compatible with the use of the land by wildlife and for fish and wildlife habitat; (e) That reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development; (f) That generally do not require the extension of urban governmental services; and (g) That are consistent with the protection of natural surface water flows and ground water and surface water recharge and discharge areas." RCW 36.70A030(14)

6. Dublin, Ohio:

Rural Residential/ Agricultural (0 - 0.5 du/ac) Land that is sparsely occupied and used primarily for farmland, agricultural uses and single-family homes on large lots. Residential lots generally range from two acres or greater and may utilize on-site services where public utilities are not available.

7. Partnerships for Change Sustainable Communities:

What is Rural Character?

The following information was adapted from "Watershed Resource Papers" developed for the Dowagiac River Watershed Project by Langworthy, Strader, LeBlanc, & Associates, Inc.

Michigan's diverse landscapes, including its shorelines, riparian areas, open fields, forests, and farmlands, draw residents to a variety of rural areas throughout the state. Rural character is many times a perception unique to the individual. One person may interpret rural character as having a low density of development; another may only recognize it where there is a complete absence of man-made features, such as signs and buildings.

But regardless of any individual interpretation of rural character, it remains true that as more people are attracted to rural areas, preserving the unique character of an area becomes more of a challenge.

Ultimately, it is the community's own definition of rural character that is the single most important part of its preservation. It is up to each community to decide what its rural character is and subsequently, how it can be preserved. For example, definitions of rural character may include the following elements:

- tree-lined streets
- farmlands
- woodlands
- clean air and water
- undeveloped open space
- natural streambanks
- natural lake shorelines
- outdoor recreation opportunities
- small villages and communities