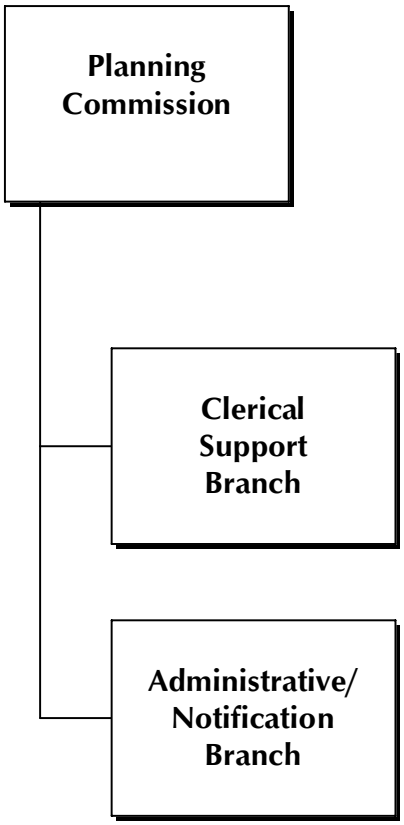
Planning Commission



Mission

To provide recommendations to the Board of Supervisors and/or the Board of Zoning Appeals on land use policies and plans that will result in orderly, balanced and equitable County growth, and to provide administrative support to the Planning Commission.

Focus

The agency provides staff support to the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors in matters relating to the County's land use policy development. The agency also ensures that interested residents' reactions are obtained on County plans, ordinance amendments and land use applications by conducting public sessions weekly, eleven months per year, and forwarding recommendations on these matters to the Board of Supervisors in a timely fashion.

The Planning Commission, through its public hearing process, provides a forum for residents to make recommendations on the County's Comprehensive Plan, both in terms of policy and specific site requests, as well as other land use applications mandated by state and County codes. The Commission staff is further mandated by the Board of Supervisors to perform notifications and verifications for abutting and adjacent property owners in all land use cases heard before the Board of Supervisors as well as the Planning Commission.

Obtaining citizen input on pending land use applications and/or policy issues is a key driver for the Planning Commission and its staff. In the last three years, the Planning Commission has averaged 76 regular Commission and committee meetings annually to ensure that the public had ample opportunity to comment on land use matters affecting the greater Fairfax community. During public hearings during this timeframe, the Commission heard verbal statements from 1,590 residents and also received more than 7,500 written position statements on various land use applications.

The following major trends have been observed during this timeframe:

Statistics indicate that the Board of Supervisors has consistently concurred with 99 percent of the recommendations forwarded by the Planning Commission, and this trend has continued for the past decade. This high concurrence rate demonstrates the level of commitment undertaken by the Commission in ensuring that the majority of issues raised by applicants and surrounding neighborhoods are resolved prior to consideration by the Board of Supervisors.

Since the County is almost fully developed, the high percentage of remaining land available is infill. Such properties have a larger number of inherent problems as well as very interested and involved resident neighbors. The resulting trend has been and continues to be an increase in the time needed for in-depth negotiation between residents, Commissioners, staff, and applicants, resulting in the continuation of the trend of an ever-increasing number of deferrals of public hearings and/or decisions at both the Commission and Board of Supervisors level. The deferrals have also resulted in a larger number of cancelled meetings due to the lack of agenda items. While up-to-date information is maintained on the Commission's Web site, such deferrals often contribute to confusion among nearby residents due to the proliferation of required, and often multiple, deferral letters per application. Additional costs must be borne as well by both the County and applicants. A short-term deferral (to a date fewer than 30 days from the original hearing date) by either the Planning Commission and/or the Board of Supervisors requires that Commission staff re-notify abutting property owners of the rescheduled hearing date. Each short-term deferral has an associated cost in both staff processing time and postage. For longer-term deferrals, while the applicant bears the cost for re-notification by certified mail, Commission staff must still verify notification accuracy and re-advertising costs must be borne by the Department of Planning and Zoning. Given the anticipated continuation of a high level of complexity in infill development cases, it is expected that this deferral trend will continue, along with subsequent impacts.

THINKING STRATEGICALLY

Strategic issues for the department include:

- Continuing to provide a forum for public comment on various policy issues related to development;
- Providing recommendations that are reasonable and logical, and that result in Board concurrence; and
- Continuing to provide the opportunity and the arena for in-depth negotiation between residents, Commissioners, staff and applicants.

With an average of 76 open meetings per year, residents are provided many opportunities to formally address the Planning Commission. During just its public hearings, the Commission heard verbal statements from 507 citizens and received 4,203 written position statements in FY 2006. Committee meetings and workshops over the past year have also continued to provide a forum for input on policy issues during early discussions by the Commission and several hundred County residents have taken the opportunity during this timeframe, particularly over such matters as minimum yard requirements, drainage divides, stream protection policies, and preliminary transit-oriented development deliberations on definition and principles. Such input is highly valued by the Commission and assists greatly in forging needed compromises on issues at hand.

The number of Commission committee meetings has remained fairly stable due to the interest of members in reaching out to other boards and commissions on related areas of interest. The Commission operates joint committees with the Fairfax County School Board, Park Authority Board, Redevelopment and Housing Authority Board, Transportation Advisory Commission and the Environmental Quality Advisory Commission, who meet on a regular basis, as well as other ongoing committees established to ease the transaction of routine business. Through these joint sessions, along with such regular committees as Policy and Procedures and the Capital Improvement Program, the Commission has found that it can provide timely input to the Board of Supervisors much more productively.

New Initiatives and Recent Accomplishments in Support of the Fairfax County Vision

Building Livable Spaces	Recent Success	FY 2008 Initiative
Continue to work with County residents to create desirable places to live and work through ongoing review of land use applications, implementing the County's Comprehensive Plan, and review of policy issues through its committee structure. There was an average of 76 Commission/Committee meetings annually over the last three years.	☑	☑
Connecting People and Places	**Recent Success**	**FY 2008 Initiative**
Continue land development review, including both pending land use applications and Area Plan Review nominations. The Commission carefully considers the adequacy and safety of the existing and/or planned road network, and works with developers, through the proffer system, to amend or provide enhancements as appropriate.	☑	☑
Practicing Environmental Stewardship	**Recent Success**	**FY 2008 Initiative**
Continue to advise the Board of Supervisors on a broad spectrum of environmental concerns relating to the Chesapeake Bay and the Occoquan watersheds, the impact of drainage divides, and stream protection which protect and enhance the environment, as well as enable the best use of existing resources in the County.	☑	☑
Creating a Culture of Engagement	**Recent Success**	**FY 2008 Initiative**
Continue use of Channel 16 to inform, interact informally with, and otherwise engage the public in its activities. In addition to its regularly-televised public hearings, the Commission continues its monthly "PC Roundtable" series that explores various planning topics in a timely manner.	☑	☑
Initiated a collaborative effort with the Department of Systems Management for Human Services to facilitate a public outreach program focused on citizen participation in the land use process within the already-established Neighborhood College program. This effort, first held in November 2005, initially targeted graduates of programs from 2003-2005. Plans are underway for a follow-up outreach program as requested by participants, as well as continuation of the basic program to reach more interested County residents.	☑	☑
Exercising Corporate Stewardship	**Recent Success**	**FY 2008 Initiative**
Continue a long-term commitment to customer service, collaborating with Department of Planning and Zoning staff to redesign notification instructions for land use applications and Area Plan Review nominations to be more "user-friendly" and allow accessibility through the County's Web site.	☑	☑

Planning Commission

Budget and Staff Resources

Agency Summary				
Category	FY 2006 Actual	FY 2007 Adopted Budget Plan	FY 2007 Revised Budget Plan	FY 2008 Advertised Budget Plan
Authorized Positions/Staff Years				
Regular	8/ 8	8/ 8	8/ 8	8/ 8
Expenditures:				
Personnel Services	$451,722	$518,001	$518,001	$541,363
Operating Expenses	207,882	208,863	208,921	209,863
Total Expenditures	**$659,604**	**$726,864**	**$726,922**	**$751,226**

Position Summary			
1	Executive Director	1	Planning Technician I
1	Management Analyst III	1	Administrative Assistant V
1	Management Analyst II	1	Administrative Assistant IV
		2	Administrative Assistants III
TOTAL POSITIONS			
8 Positions / 8.0 Staff Years			

FY 2008 Funding Adjustments

The following funding adjustments from the FY 2007 Revised Budget Plan are necessary to support the FY 2008 program:

- **Employee Compensation** **$23,362**
  An increase of $23,362 associated with salary adjustments necessary to support the County's compensation program.

- **Other Adjustments** **$942**
  A net increase of $942 reflects an increase of $1,000 in the PC Replacement Program based on the number of PCs scheduled to be replaced in FY 2008 according to the four-year replacement cycle, partially offset by a decrease of $58 due to the carryover of one-time expenses included as part of the *FY 2006 Carryover Review*.

Changes to FY 2007 Adopted Budget Plan

The following funding adjustments reflect all approved changes in the FY 2007 Revised Budget Plan since passage of the FY 2007 Adopted Budget Plan. Included are all adjustments made as part of the FY 2006 Carryover Review and all other approved changes through December 31, 2006:

- **Carryover Adjustments** **$58**
  As part of the *FY 2006 Carryover Review*, the Board of Supervisors approved an increase of $58 in Operating Expenses due to the carryover of one-time expenses.

Key Performance Measures

Goal

To provide recommendations to the Board of Supervisors and/or the Board of Zoning Appeals on land use policies and plans that will result in orderly, balanced and equitable County growth, and to provide administrative support to the Planning Commission.

Objectives

- To ensure that citizens' reactions and input are obtained on all land use-related applications by conducting weekly public sessions, 11 months per year; holding committee sessions as deemed necessary by the Planning Commission membership; and maintaining Planning Commission recommendations approved by the Board of Supervisors at 99 percent.

- To continue legal notification processing on pending land use cases by maintaining the percent of notifications verified at 95 percent within 17 days prior to the scheduled hearing date for hearings scheduled before the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

- To continue to produce Planning Commission actions for the public record by preparing 100 percent of summaries and verbatim transcripts within three working days and meeting minutes within one month of hearing date.

- To maintain customer satisfaction with service provided over the telephone at 98 percent.

- To maintain customer satisfaction with web site service at its current level of 98 percent.

Indicator	Prior Year Actuals			Current Estimate	Future Estimate
	FY 2004 Actual	FY 2005 Actual	FY 2006 Estimate/Actual	FY 2007	FY 2008
Output:					
Public sessions held	53	53	60 / 54	60	57
Committee meetings held	21	25	25 / 19	25	25
Notifications verified for Planning Commission (PC)	140	168	175 / 172	175	175
Notifications verified for Board of Supervisors (BOS)	110	99	110 / 72	110	100
Area Plans Review Notifications verified	93	23	90 / 145	NA	90
Verbatim pages completed	552	528	550 / 597	600	600
Minute pages completed	570	672	625 / 696	675	700
Summaries completed	53	53	60 / 54	60	57
Information requests processed	17,350	15,327	15,000 / 10,280	13,000	10,000
Summary pages completed	192	201	210 / 211	220	220

Planning Commission

Indicator	Prior Year Actuals FY 2004 Actual	FY 2005 Actual	FY 2006 Estimate/Actual	Current Estimate FY 2007	Future Estimate FY 2008
Efficiency:					
Average cost per public session/committee meeting	$2,527	$2,363	$2,213 / $2,532	$2,213	$2,254
Average cost per notification processed for PC/BOS hearings	$120	$131	$143 / $137	$145	$176
Average cost per Area Plan review verification	$110	$141	$96 / $96	NA	$138
Average hours required for complete meeting summary and verbatim pages	23	16	14 / 5	8	6
Average hours required for completion of set of minutes	10	12	12 / 9	12	10
Average time (in minutes) spent per website inquiry	5	4	3 / 3	3	3
Average time (in minutes) spent per telephone or in-person inquiry	5	3	3 / 4	3	3
Service Quality:					
Area Plans Review Submissions reviewed within 15 working days	110	0	90 / 145	NA	90
Verifications processed within 17 days prior to hearing dates for PC/BOS public hearings	200	267	270 / 244	275	275
Average backlog of sets of minutes (regular and committee) to date	30	0	0 / 2	0	0
Percent of committee minutes completed within one month of meeting date	70%	50%	75% / 89%	85%	90%
Percent of regular sets of minutes completed within one month of meeting date	76%	100%	100% / 86%	100%	90%
Information requests processed within one day or less	17,275	15,254	14,925 / 10,240	11,925	9,970
Information requests processed within two days	75	73	75 / 40	75	30
Outcome:					
Percent of Planning Commission actions approved by BOS	100%	99%	99% / 99%	99%	99%
Percent of notifications verified within 17 days of PC/BOS hearing deadlines	90%	100%	95% / 100%	95%	95%
Percent of summaries and verbatim pages completed within three working days	100%	100%	100% / 100%	100%	100%
Percent of customers satisfied with service provided via phone or direct contact	98%	98%	98% / 99%	98%	98%
Percent of customers satisfied with service response provided by website	98%	98%	98% / 99%	98%	98%

Performance Measurement Results

The Planning Commission held a total of 73 Commission and committee meetings in FY 2006 to ensure public input on land use matters affecting their communities. This 6.4 percent decrease from the FY 2005 meeting schedule was primarily attributable to a small decrease in the number of joint committee meetings held due to scheduling difficulties among the various bodies involved. The Commission continued its high concurrence rate of 99 percent with the Board of Supervisors on land use actions and anticipates the same in both FY 2007 and FY 2008.

Although there was stabilization in the number of regular meetings held in FY 2006, as compared with FY 2005, the Commission's Clerical Branch saw increases in the total summary pages completed (5.0 percent) and verbatim (13.1 percent) pages produced as compared to the previous year. At the same time, there was also an increase (3.6 percent) in the total number of minute pages produced compared to the previous fiscal year. These increases can be primarily attributed to additional residents testifying during the South County Area Plan Review public hearings. The Clerical Branch experienced major increases in its efficiency levels as measured in both the time it took to complete meeting verbatims (69 percent) and meeting minutes (25 percent) from the previous year. The branch was also able to maintain its target of completing all regular and committee minutes within one month of the hearing date until the last month of the fiscal year when a slight aberration occurred due to the transfer of a branch member to another County agency. With full staffing of the branch by September 2006, it is anticipated that the staff will again retain this rate of minute's completion within the one month goal, while simultaneously maintaining 100 percent completion rate goals for summaries and verbatims.

Concurrently, the Commission's Administrative/Notifications Branch saw a slight increase of 2.4 percent in the number of Planning Commission notifications verified but a 27.3 percent decrease in the total notifications verified for the Board of Supervisors public hearings due to increase in the number of deferrals by both hearing bodies of previously-scheduled public hearings. As in the previous fiscal year, 100 percent of verifications were again accomplished within the stated goal of 17 days before scheduled hearing dates. The Planning Commission staff continued to review all submissions in a timely fashion, and there were no deferrals for either Commission or Board public hearings solely due to notification problems as result of maintaining this high level of diligence.

The Commission staff continues to offer excellent customer service, and as measured by ongoing surveys, has achieved a favorable response rate of 99 percent from its customers through telephone and direct contacts. Staff also realized a 99 percent satisfaction rate on Web site responses, with particular emphasis on speed and accuracy. It should be again noted that the number of hours spent by staff on updating Web agenda-related information continues to increase each fiscal year as staff strives to provide additional updates as they occur on its site, particularly calendar changes, and posts new materials on a frequent basis. As a result of the "customer-friendly" data posted on the site, the agency has seen a 32.9 percent drop in the number of actual information requests processed since customers are able to readily locate information online.