



**A Publication of the County of Fairfax, Virginia  
Department of Planning & Zoning**

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## **STAFF REPORT 2008-2009 NORTH COUNTY AREA PLANS REVIEW**

**SUPERVISOR DISTRICT:** DRANESVILLE

**APR ITEM(S):** 08-III-13UP

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**NOMINATOR(S):** Eric Knudsen

**ACREAGE:** N/A

**TAX MAP I.D.:** Portions of Tax Map 6-4, 7-3, 11-2, 12-1, 12-2, 13-1 and 13-4 traversed by Georgetown Pike

**GENERAL LOCATION:** Entire segment of Georgetown Pike within the Upper Potomac Planning District. Properties abutting Georgetown Pike from Leesburg Pike to Difficult Run, approximately 205.30 acres.

**PLANNING AREA:** III  
**District:** Upper Potomac  
**Sector:** Riverfront (UP1), Springvale (UP2) and Hickory (UP3)  
**Special Areas:** N/A

**ADOPTED PLAN MAP:** N/A

**ADOPTED PLAN TEXT:** “Georgetown Pike has been designated as a Virginia Byway. The current roadway alignment should be maintained. Scenic and conservation easements should be sought along Georgetown Pike wherever practical for the preservation of the historic and scenic significance and beauty of the corridor.”

For complete Plan text see: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/comprehensiveplan/area3/upperpotomac.pdf>

**PROPOSED PLAN AMENDMENT:** Add new text noting eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register, and limiting densities within 100 – 150 feet of Georgetown Pike in the Upper Potomac Planning District

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**SUMMARY OF STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

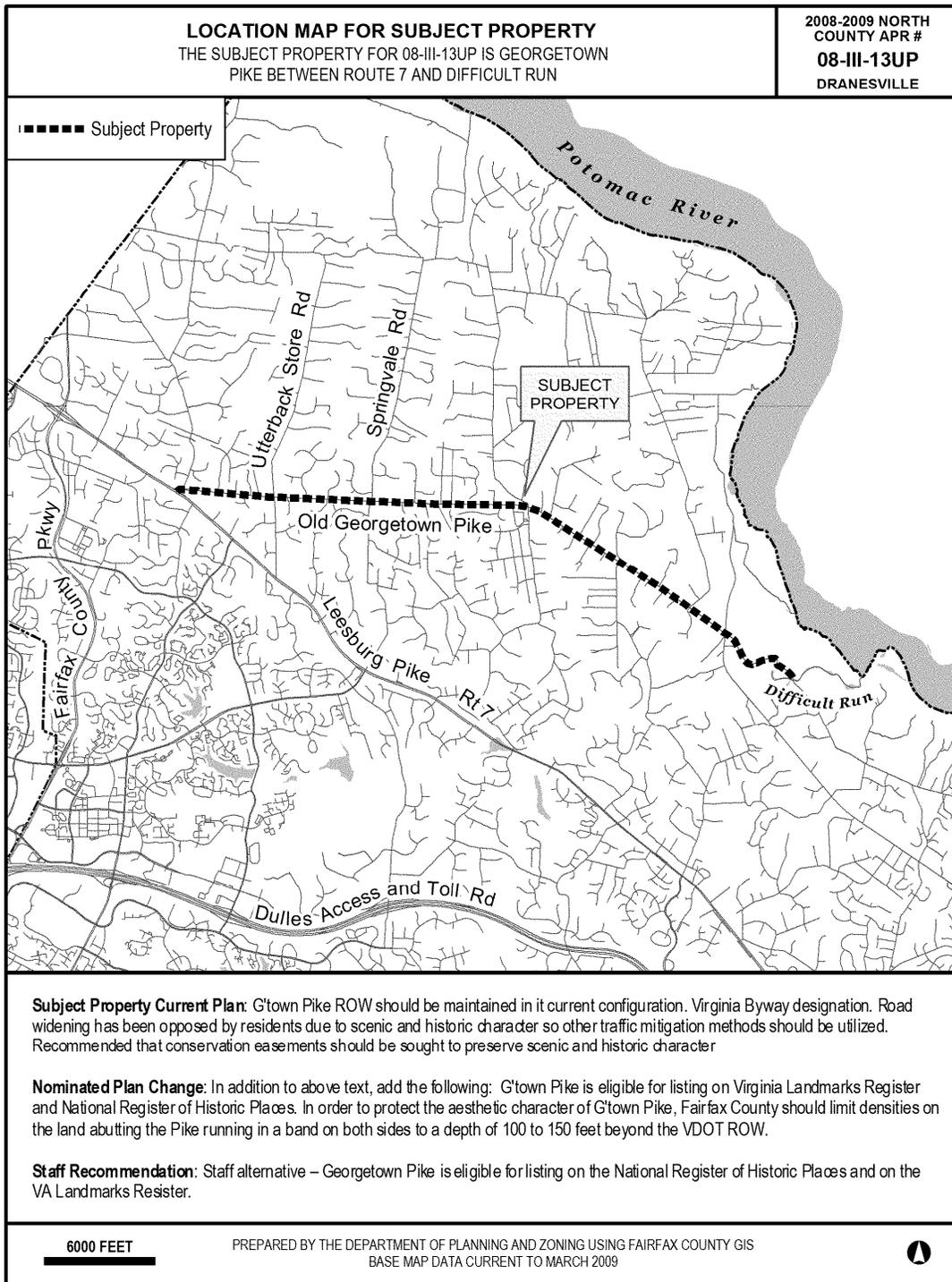
Approve Nomination As Submitted

Approve Staff Alternative

Retain Adopted Plan

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Staff supports indicating that the road is eligible for listing on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. With respect to setbacks, Staff does not support adding text to limit densities along Georgetown Pike beyond those currently recommended in the Comprehensive Plan.



## CONTEXT

### General Location:

The proposed nomination concerns the segment of Georgetown Pike within the Upper Potomac Planning District. This segment extends from Old Dominion Drive on the east to Leesburg Pike (Route 7) on the west.

### Existing and Planned Land Use

The segment of Georgetown Pike that lies within the Upper Potomac Planning District is a two-lane road that traverses scenic areas of rolling hills. It is primarily developed with single family houses on large lots. Some of the structures are historically significant. Georgetown Pike also runs through the Village of Great Falls, a small commercial and civic center that contains some historic structures, and a smaller commercial area in the vicinity of the Seneca Square Shopping Center at the intersection of Leesburg Pike and Georgetown Pike.

Georgetown Pike is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. It is listed as a Virginia Byway which is a historic and scenic roadway designation of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

## PLANNING HISTORY

During the Planning Horizons process of the early 1990's, language was added to the new Environment section for the McLean Planning District that identified Georgetown Pike as a prominent aesthetic feature of the District, and recommended limiting land use densities to a depth of 100-150 feet in a band of land running along Georgetown Pike within the McLean Planning District. The nomination seeks to update information regarding historic register eligibility and to replicate this text for the segment of Georgetown Pike in the Upper Potomac Planning District

## ADOPTED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TEXT

Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2007 Edition, Area III, Upper Potomac Planning District, Amended through, 6-30-2008, Riverfront (UP1), Springvale (UP2), Hickory (UP3) Planning Sectors, Transportation section:

“Georgetown Pike should be maintained within its existing right-of-way. Center turn lanes and deceleration and acceleration lanes should be discouraged and curb cuts should not be allowed unless no other alternative exists. Georgetown Pike is commonly acknowledged to contain some traffic hazards. However, it is generally acceptable in its present condition to local residents. It has been designated a Virginia Byway. Major changes in alignment or widening the road would damage the scenic and historic character and the historic integrity of the Byway and have been strongly opposed by residents of adjacent areas. Planning efforts should focus on other means of dealing with

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traffic volume in order to maintain this Byway. Scenic and conservation easements should be sought along Georgetown Pike wherever practical for the preservation of the historic and scenic significance and beauty of the corridor.”

## NOMINATED PLAN AMENDMENT

Replace the current Plan text, which is the same in the Transportation section of Planning Sectors UP1, UP2 and UP3 (as cited previously) with the following new text (new text is underlined, text to be deleted is in strikethrough format, existing text to remain is in normal type):

“Georgetown Pike, which has been designated a Virginia Byway and determined eligible for listing on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places, should be maintained within its existing right-of-way. Center turn lanes and deceleration and acceleration lanes should be discouraged and curb cuts should not be allowed unless no other alternative exists. Georgetown Pike is commonly acknowledged to contain some traffic hazards. However it is generally acceptable in its present condition to local residents. ~~It has been designated a Virginia Byway.~~ Major changes in alignment or widening the road would damage the scenic and historic character and historic integrity of the Byway and have been strongly opposed by residents of adjacent areas. Planning efforts should focus on other means of dealing with traffic volume in order to maintain this Byway. Scenic and conservation easements should be sought along Georgetown Pike wherever practical for the preservation of the historic and scenic significance and beauty of the corridor. In order to protect the aesthetic character of Georgetown Pike, Fairfax County should limit densities on the land abutting the Pike running in a band on both sides to a depth of 100 to 150 feet beyond the VDOT right-of-way.”

## ANALYSIS

The Plan amendment nomination proposes that the County limit densities in a band running along Georgetown Pike for a depth of 100 to 150 feet. The proposed text is taken from another part of the Comprehensive Plan where it appears in the McLean Planning District Overview, under the Environment subheading and applies to a segment of Georgetown Pike located to the east. This language for McLean has been in the Comprehensive Plan for more than 15 years. Similar to the Upper Potomac Planning District, the properties abutting Georgetown Pike in McLean are zoned RE and R-1. The Upper Potomac segment differs in that retail and office uses also front on Georgetown Pike.

### Implementation

There is an issue of whether the proposed buffer language could be implemented effectively. The Comprehensive Plan is consulted when a zoning action is proposed, but not in the case of by-right development. In McLean, it does not appear that the text has had any impact on the character of Georgetown Pike because there have been no identified rezoning actions and only a few special exception actions on this segment of Georgetown Pike. These special exceptions

were for private schools and churches and concerned requests for adding additional facilities such as class rooms and sports courts. The structures on these parcels were already set back from the Pike beyond the current required front yard setbacks in the RE and R-1 zoning districts. In addition, the current Plan contains the following language with regard to special exceptions and special permits: "In this planning sector, uses requiring special permits and special exception approval should be rigorously reviewed and permitted only when the use is of a size and scale that will not adversely impact adjacent land uses and the overall low density residential character of the area." This language would cover setback distances and is sufficient guidance to insure that these types of properties do not have an adverse impact on the Pike's historic and scenic character and appears in the Land Use sections of UP1, UP2 and UP3 Planning Sectors.

In the case of by-right residential development, if a home is newly constructed, rebuilt or renovated in accordance with the existing zoning district, then the Comprehensive Plan would not be consulted and no additional setbacks beyond those of the current zoning district would be sought. By-right residential development is required to meet a minimum front yard setback of 40 feet in the R-1 district and 50 feet in the RE district.

There are certain commercial uses that are required to obtain a special exception permit in the C-2, C-6 and C-8 districts. These include service stations, drive-through banks and carwashes. Other commercial uses such as stores and offices that develop or redevelop under by-right zoning would only have to meet a minimum front yard setback of 25 feet in the C-2 Zoning District and 40 feet in the C-6 and C-8 Zoning Districts. If the guidance pertaining to setbacks were adopted, the construction or redevelopment of certain types of business which might be beneficial to the community could be limited, because many properties are of a shallow depth and cannot provide deep setbacks.

During consideration of the item, the Dranesville APR Task Force and staff considered alternate versions of the nomination. One alternate encouraged "setbacks that preserve and protect the historic significance and scenic beauty of Georgetown Pike." A second version, initially supported by staff, excluded commercial properties.

To better understand the character of development along the Pike, an aerial map was overlaid with setback lines of 50, 75 and 150 feet. The exercise revealed that within the Upper Potomac Planning District, almost all residential properties are within at least 75 feet of the roadway (over 80 homes), and all commercial properties fall within 50 feet of the roadway. As the determination of eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places and Virginia Landmarks Register attests, the character of the Pike is not diminished by the presence of structures fairly close to the Road. The exercise also brought into question the appropriateness of exempting businesses because there are many residential structures that are similarly situated. Finally because there is little opportunity for the setback language to be implemented, staff believes that adding the text to the Comprehensive Plan could create unrealistic expectations as to what will happen when properties develop under the existing zoning.

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**RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Comprehensive Plan be amended to reflect Georgetown Pike's designation as a Virginia Byway, and determination of eligibility for listing on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. Staff does not support the portion of the nomination that recommends establishing wide setbacks along the road. Recent research demonstrates that many existing residential and commercial structures are located fairly close to Georgetown Pike. In addition, the current Plan contains text that recommends a more rigorous level of review for uses that are allowed by special exceptions or special permit that would ensure that the historic and scenic character of Georgetown Pike is protected, which does not support the need for additional setback recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan.

Regarding the approach to exempt some properties, staff believes that unequal application of the recommendation could undermine the National Register and Virginia Landmarks determination. Conversely, applying the text encouraging setbacks to the entire segment could inadvertently limit the sustainability of the small commercial areas and establish unrealistic expectations in the residential areas, both of which have structures in close proximity to the road. Given that the Byway designation and the historic eligibility determinations were made absent the proposed text, Staff does not find adequate justification to support adding text encouraging the establishment of wide setbacks along Georgetown Pike.

Staff recommends that the Comprehensive Plan be modified as shown below. Text proposed to be added is shown as underlined, text proposed to be deleted is shown as ~~strikethrough~~.

**MODIFY:** Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2007 Edition, Area III, Upper Potomac Planning District, Amended Through June, 30 2008, Riverfront (UP1), Springvale (UP2), Hickory (UP3) Planning Sectors, Transportation section:

“Georgetown Pike, which has been designated a Virginia Byway and determined eligible for listing on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places, should be maintained within its existing right-of-way. Center turn lanes and deceleration and acceleration lanes should be discouraged and curb cuts should not be allowed unless no other alternative exists. Georgetown Pike is commonly acknowledged to contain some traffic hazards. However it is generally acceptable in its present condition to local residents. It has been designated a Virginia Byway....”

NOTE: The Comprehensive Plan Map would not change.