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STAFF REPORT
2009-2010 SOUTH COUNTY AREA PLANS REVIEW

SUPERVISOR DISTRICT: MOUNT VERNON **APR ITEM:** 09-IV-1LP

NOMINATOR(S): Linwood Gorham on behalf of the South County Federation

ACREAGE: N/A

TAX MAP I.D.: N/A

GENERAL LOCATION: Generally located east of Hooes Road, south of the Fairfax County Parkway, west of the eastern boundary of Fort Belvoir and north of the Potomac River.

PLANNING AREA: IV
District: Lower Potomac
Sector: N/A
Special Areas: N/A

ADOPTED PLAN MAP: N/A

ADOPTED PLAN TEXT: See Adopted Comprehensive Plan Text section

PROPOSED PLAN AMENDMENT: Add the following bullet to the Lower Potomac Planning District, Overview, Major Objectives section, page 3, and Lorton-South Route 1 Community Planning Sector Major Objectives, Land Use section page 63:

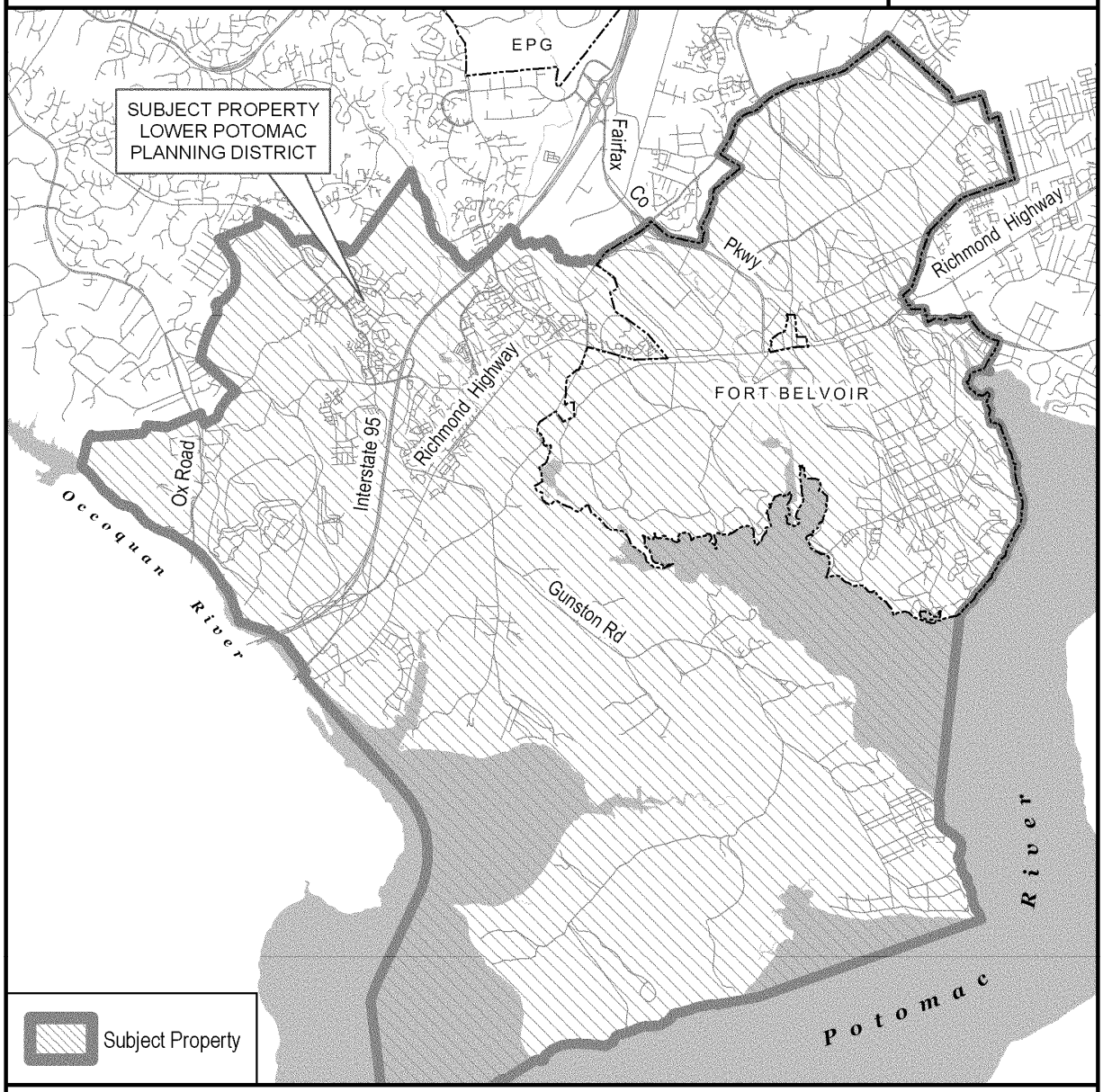
- "Keep the skyline as natural and green as possible. Promote building height that is consistent or lower than the tree canopy"

SUMMARY OF STAFF RECOMMENDATION:
___ Approve Nomination As Submitted
___ Approve Staff Alternative
_X_ Retain Adopted Plan

The proposed nomination has merit in that it seeks to achieve compatibility between existing development and new development, and to ensure that the design of new development respects the natural topography and existing tree cover of the Lower Potomac Planning District. However, the proposed building height limit is vague and would be difficult to implement. Therefore, staff recommends that the adopted Plan be retained.

LOCATION MAP FOR SUBJECT PROPERTY
THE SUBJECT PROPERTY FOR 09-IV-1LP IS COMPRISED OF
THE LOWER POTOMAC PLANNING DISTRICT

2009-2010 SOUTH COUNTY APR #
09-IV-1LP
MT. VERNON



Subject Property Current Plan: Lower Potomac Planning District, Overview, Major Objectives section includes guidance related to establishing focal points for development, preserving stable residential areas, pedestrian links, adequate buffering between residential and non-residential areas, adequate parks and open spaces and protecting sensitive environmental and historic resources.

Nominated Plan Change: Lower Potomac Planning District, Overview, Major Objectives section add new bulleted text "Keep the skyline as natural and green as possible. Promote building height that is consistent or lower than the tree canopy."

Staff Recommendation: Retain the Adopted Plan.

1 MILE

PREPARED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING USING FAIRFAX COUNTY GIS
BASE MAP DATA CURRENT TO APRIL 2010

CONTEXT

General Location:

The nomination concerns the entire Lower Potomac Planning District. The subject area is generally located east of Hooes Road, south of the Fairfax County Parkway, west of the Eastern boundary of Fort Belvoir, and north of the Potomac River.

Lower Potomac Planning District-Wide Recommendations:

The Lower Potomac Planning District, Overview, Major Objectives section, and the Lorton-South Route 1 Community Planning Sector, Major Objectives, Land Use section both include objectives that relate to creating a sense of place, preserving stable residential neighborhoods, adequate provision of open space, and protecting heritage resources. These overall objectives serve as a guide for the future character of the Planning District, especially for areas with no specific Plan recommendations.

ADOPTED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TEXT

Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2007 Edition, Area IV, Lower Potomac Planning District, amended through 5-4-2009, Overview, Major Objectives, page 3:

"MAJOR OBJECTIVES

Planning objectives in the Lower Potomac Planning District are:

- Create a focal point of development or "Town Center" which includes retail businesses, office uses, cultural facilities and community services and establishes a strong "sense of place" and positive image for the Lorton-South Route 1 area;
- Preserve stable residential areas through infill development of a character and intensity or density that is compatible with existing residential uses;
- Limit commercial encroachment into residential neighborhoods and establish a clearly defined "edge" between commercial and residential areas;
- Encourage pedestrian access to retail and mixed-use areas;
- Encourage the creation of additional parks, open space and recreation areas and acquisition of additional acreage in environmentally sensitive areas as part of the Environmental Quality Corridor program;
- Identify, preserve and promote awareness of heritage resources through research, survey and community involvement; and
- Provide adequate buffering and screening and appropriate transitional land uses between residential areas and non-residential uses."

Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2007 Edition, Area IV, Lower Potomac Planning District, Lorton-South Route 1 Community Planning Sector, amended through 5-4-2009, Major Objectives, Land Use, page 63:

"MAJOR OBJECTIVES

Land Use

Develop a strong "sense of place" and positive image for the Lorton-South Route 1 area:

- Implement the positive image and sense of place through the "Town Center" concept and provide for retail, governmental and commercial offices, cultural facilities, and community services at the Center and at other key sub-units;

- Reinforce the "Town Center" land use concept with a transit center for local and regional bus service and the Lorton commuter rail station. Such transportation services should be connected to neighborhoods by vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian access;

- Strengthen the concept that the planning area is the southern "gateway" to the National Capital Area through encouraging "gateway" land uses and roadside visual improvements; special emphasis should be placed on preserving or restoring landscaped or natural treed open space along major roadways;

- Proposed land uses should be limited to those uses which will promote an improvement in the image of the area;

- Preserve and add vegetation and other landscape and streetscape elements to the Richmond Highway Corridor;

- Provide access into the core of large parcels of industrial use, so that these operations are shielded from view;

- Locate heavy industrial uses away from the roadways; Add extensive landscaping, screening and/or other buffering at the roadway edges;

- Construct a comprehensive, understandable, and attractive signage system. Discourage the use of billboards;

- Encourage public facilities and private development to exhibit exemplary design excellence in terms of architecture, siting, and landscaping through use of an architectural code or appearance code; and

- Encourage the development of a mix of housing at varying densities and costs near employment centers and mass transportation facilities. By-right industrially zoned land should be encouraged to develop as positive community uses in these areas where public sewer service areas may be expanded.

Preserve and protect existing, stable residential neighborhoods:

- Buffer residential areas from abutting and otherwise intrusive, adjacent, non- residential uses that have odor, noise and visual impacts;

- Protect stable neighborhoods from encroachment by commercial, industrial, higher density residential projects or other disruptive land uses such as landfills, incinerators, institutions, etc.;
- Develop infill of residential areas with residential uses of compatible densities;
- Develop a broad range of land use types to provide for the housing, employment, retail and social service needs of all residents;
- Develop housing at varying densities and costs;
- Locate land uses such as adult and child day care facilities and nursing homes;
- Develop low-intensity office and light industrial uses to both employ and serve area residents; and
- Develop and focus shopping facilities in the area for area residents, conveniently located for auto, bicycle or pedestrian access and limit their "sprawl."”

NOMINATED PLAN AMENDMENT

The nomination proposes to add the following text to the Lower Potomac Planning District, Overview, Major Objectives section, page 3, and Lorton-South Route 1 Community Planning Sector Major Objectives, Land Use section page 63:

- “Keep the skyline as natural and green as possible. Promote building height that is consistent or lower than the tree canopy”

ANALYSIS

Land Use

The proposed nomination has merit in that it seeks to achieve compatibility between existing development and new development, and to ensure that the design of new development respects the natural topography and existing tree cover of the Lower Potomac Planning District. The nomination would be difficult to implement however, because building height is regulated by the County’s Zoning Ordinance, and zoning height limits apply to individual properties, not to such large areas of land such as that encompassed by the Lower Potomac Planning District. In addition, the concepts of the “skyline” and/ or the “tree canopy” would also be extremely difficult to quantify in terms of establishing a measurement to compare to a proposed building’s height. An example of such a measurement would be the average height of the tree canopy. The difficulty would be measuring and establishing the average height.

RECOMMENDATION

Although the Task Force recommended approval of the nomination as submitted stating that the proposed text to be added to the Plan would serve as a general guideline for developers, Staff feels that implementation of the proposed nomination would be extremely difficult and that the

proposed text regarding limiting building height to the same height or lower than the height of the existing tree canopy would be largely ignored because staff would be unable to develop a quantifiable standard that could be applied in a fair and equitable manner. Staff believes that there are other ways to ensure compatibility of new development with the natural conditions of the area, and this could be better achieved on a case by case basis during the rezoning and land development processes. Therefore, staff recommends that the current Plan be retained.