

**PRELIMINARY
STAFF REPORT
2009-2010 SOUTH COUNTY AREA PLANS REVIEW**

SUPERVISOR DISTRICT: MOUNT VERNON

APR ITEM(S): 09-IV-7MV

NOMINATOR: Patrick Rea

ACREAGE: N/A

TAX MAP I.D.: N/A

GENERAL LOCATION: Entire Mount Vernon Planning District, generally located south of Fairfax County – Alexandria City line, west of the Potomac River and northeast of Fort Belvoir.

PLANNING AREA: IV
District: Mount Vernon
Sector: N/A
Special Areas: N/A

ADOPTED PLAN MAP: N/A

POLICY PLAN TEXT: The Policy Plan of the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan recommends the following:

- **“Environment: Pages 7-9, Objective 2 - Prevent and reduce pollution of surface and groundwater resources. Protect and restore the ecological integrity of streams in Fairfax County.**
 - Policies k) low impact development, minimize impervious surfaces, tree conservation; m) consider recommendations of watershed management plans; n)optimize stormwater management and water quality controls and practices for redevelopment consistent with revitalization goals.
- **Environment: page 10, Objective 3 – Protect the Potomac Estuary and the Chesapeake Bay from the avoidable impacts of land use activities in Fairfax County.**
 - Policies a) ensure that development and redevelopment complies with Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance; c) for tidal shoreline control measures, apply techniques consistent with guidelines in the Environmental Appendix (referencing state guidance documents and supporting a preference for biological techniques using native plant species)
- **Environment: pages 14-15 – Identify, protect and enhance an integrated network of ecologically valuable land and surface waters for present and future residents of Fairfax County.**
 - Policy a) protect and restore an Environmental Quality Corridor system.

- **Environment: page 16, Objective 10 – Conserve and restore tree cover on sites where it is absent prior to development.**
 - Policy a) protect and restore maximum amount of tree cover on developed and developing sites.”

For complete Plan text see:

www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/comprehensiveplan/policyplan/

AREA PLAN TEXT: See Attachment I

PROPOSED PLAN

AMENDMENT:

Add new text to the Mount Vernon Planning District Overview Planning Objectives and Environment sections that encourages pedestrian and bicycle facilities, tree conservation, low impact development techniques etc., and update the description of the environmental conditions within the Mount Vernon Planning District. For complete nominated plan text, see Attachment II.

SUMMARY OF STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Approve Nomination as submitted

Approve Staff Alternative

Retain Adopted Plan

Fairfax County has been developing watershed management plans for all watersheds in the county that include specific recommendations for improvements in stormwater management and environmental protection and suggested changes in county policies and practices that address these issues. The nomination proposes to add references to watershed plans to the guidance in the Area IV Plan, Mount Vernon Planning District Overview, Planning Objectives section, and to update the Environment section by summarizing the status of the watershed planning process in the district, describing how watershed management plans support state and federal water quality efforts, and referencing a “living shorelines” policy that has been adopted by the Fairfax County Wetlands Board.

Staff agrees with the intent of the proposed nomination, but the wording of the proposed nomination regarding recommendations for stormwater management and protection of sensitive environmental resources could have unintended consequences related to limiting the application of the recommendations to areas that are covered by a watershed management plan only, and that may not be practical in terms of implementation with regard to Resource Protection Areas (RPAs) and floodplains, in light of the existence of RPA and floodplain areas that have been subject to extensive development (e.g., the New Alexandria area). In addition, inclusion of text reporting on the status of watershed management plan adoption will soon become outdated. Therefore, staff is proposing an alternative that would, in its view, achieve the intent of the nomination without these limitations and that would make implementation of the recommendations more likely. The complete staff alternative text can be found in Appendix III.

CRITICAL ISSUES**Environmental**

Fairfax County has been developing watershed management plans for all watersheds in the county. These plans include site-specific recommendations for improvements in stormwater management, including low impact development (LID) techniques, as well as broader recommendations addressing county policies and practices to promote water quality improvements and the protection of sensitive environmental resources.

The nomination proposes to more accurately describe the watersheds within the Mount Vernon Planning District boundaries and to add references to watershed management plan recommendations to the guidance contained within the Comprehensive Plan. While staff supports general references to the watershed planning process, there is a concern that the inclusion of text reporting on the status of plan adoption will soon become outdated and that limiting certain recommendations to areas where watershed plans exist would, in the short term, have the unintended consequence of excluding relevant policy recommendations from areas without watershed plans, and, in the long-term, be unnecessary. The proposed nomination also includes a recommendation for discouraging development and redevelopment in Resource Protection Areas (RPAs) and floodplains. There are large existing developed areas within the Mount Vernon Planning District that are within RPAs and floodplains (e.g., the New Alexandria area). Implying that these areas have the same environmental sensitivity as undeveloped RPAs and floodplains would be inaccurate. The nomination recommends that no redevelopment activity should occur in existing developed areas within RPAs and floodplains. Staff feels that his guidance would be inappropriate for such areas that have already have a largely developed character. Finally, the proposed nomination would also add general language addressing pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

Conclusion

Staff agrees with the general intent of the proposed nomination but the manner in which the proposed Plan text is written may have unintended consequences and may result in some policies that cannot be practically implemented. Therefore, staff is proposing alternative language that it feels addresses the nominator's intent, and also some minor wording changes that eliminate some of the redundancies found in the current Plan text and that clarify guidance related to stormwater management and protection of sensitive environmental resources. The complete staff alternative text is found in Appendix III.

**ATTACHMENT I
AREA PLAN TEXT**

Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2007 edition, Mount Vernon Planning District, amended through 8-3-2009, pages 3-4:

“PLANNING OBJECTIVES

Planning objectives in the Mount Vernon Planning District include the following:

- Preserve stable residential neighborhoods through appropriate infill development which is compatible in use, type and intensity with surrounding uses.
- Limit commercial encroachment into stable residential neighborhoods and establish well-defined edges between commercial and residential uses.
- Establish well-defined buffers, particularly for existing residential development adjacent to high density/intensity corridors, with appropriate pedestrian access between commercial and residential areas.
- Establish an appropriate mix of land uses and intensities in the Community Business Centers along Richmond Highway and provide transitions to adjacent Suburban Neighborhoods.
- Encourage pedestrian access to commercial areas and improve the appearance and image of Richmond Highway by addressing issues of functional efficiency, aesthetics streetscaping and design by using the urban design principles found in this section.
- Improve and upgrade existing commercial development within the Community Business Centers along the Richmond Highway Corridor to serve as the focus of office buildings, hotel, and other commercial development that encourages the growth of professional employment opportunities and promotes tourism and related activities.
- Encourage improved access to and increased ridership of the transit system.
- Encourage transit ridership by encouraging appropriate economic development and redevelopment around the Huntington Metro Station.
- Encourage the consolidation of small land parcels to provide for future development opportunities.
- Improve the public’s perception of the environmental and heritage resources of the Mount Vernon area.
- Identify, preserve and promote awareness of heritage resources through research, survey and community involvement.
- Protect environmentally sensitive areas.
- Protect wetlands and environmental quality corridors.

Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2007 edition, Mount Vernon Planning District, amended through 8-3-2009, page 12:

Environment

The Mount Vernon Planning District is located within the watersheds of Cameron Run, Belle Haven, Little Hunting Creek, and Dogue Creek. The Potomac River shoreline, designated a critical environmental area by the State of Virginia, contains tidal wetlands and estuaries along the shores of Hunting Creek, Little Hunting Creek, and Dogue Creek. This Planning District is within the Coastal Plain geologic province. Consequently, soils are marginal for septic tank usage. Slippage-prone swelling clays underlie most of the district. Any development in areas with these conditions should be based on the latest technologies for stabilizing marine clays from soil slippage. Assurances which protect the County and affected properties should be provided.

The Potomac River shoreline which includes a broad floodplain, tidal wetlands and several small embayments is the most significant environmental feature in the district. Activities that require modifications to the shoreline are regulated by the Wetlands Board. The shoreline and adjacent tributaries are also protected by the regulations of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act.

As growth continues, it is expected that development of environmentally constrained lands will become economically feasible, although environmental constraints will limit their development potential. Future development in this district should also be encouraged to achieve environmental reclamation of degraded environmental quality corridors and other sensitive features.

Older, developed portions of the County often have fair to poor surface water quality. This is due primarily to nonpoint source pollution in the form of runoff which contains high levels of fertilizers, pesticides, sediment and hydrocarbons. Older suburban areas such as the Mount Vernon Planning District do not have the benefit of state-of-the-art water quality practices. Therefore, they are a particular challenge to the County's efforts to improve surface water quality and meet the spirit of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act.”

**ATTACHMENT II
NOMINATED PLAN TEXT**

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, Mount Vernon Planning District, amended through 8-3-2009, pages 3-4:

“PLANNING OBJECTIVES

- Planning objectives in the Mount Vernon Planning District include the following:
- Preserve stable residential neighborhoods through appropriate infill development which is compatible in use, type and intensity with surrounding uses.
- Limit commercial encroachment into stable residential neighborhoods and establish well-defined edges between commercial and residential uses.
- Establish well-defined buffers, particularly for existing residential development adjacent to high density/intensity corridors, with appropriate pedestrian access between commercial and residential areas.
- Establish an appropriate mix of land uses and intensities in the Community Business Centers along Richmond Highway and provide transitions to adjacent Suburban Neighborhoods.
- Encourage pedestrian access to commercial areas and improve the appearance and image of Richmond Highway by addressing issues of functional efficiency, pedestrian safety, aesthetics streetscaping, tree cover and design by using the urban design principles found in this section.
- Improve and upgrade existing commercial development within the Community Business Centers along the Richmond Highway Corridor to serve as the focus of office buildings, hotel, and other commercial development that encourages the growth of professional employment opportunities and promotes tourism and related activities.
- Encourage improved access to and increased ridership of the transit system.
- Encourage new development and redevelopment to provide pedestrian and bicycle facilities to include trails, sidewalks, and street crossings.
- Encourage transit ridership by encouraging appropriate economic development and redevelopment around the Huntington Metro Station.
- Encourage the consolidation of small land parcels to provide for future development opportunities.

- Improve the public's perception and use of the environmental and heritage resources of the Mount Vernon area.
- Identify, preserve and promote awareness of heritage resources through research, survey and community involvement.
- Protect environmentally sensitive areas as recommended whenever and wherever a watershed management plan exists.
- Protect wetlands and environmental quality corridors.
- Encourage the conservation of existing urban forest assets.
- Utilize Low Impact Development (LID) practices in development and redevelopment projects as recommended whenever and wherever a watershed management plan exists.
- Encourage reductions in the amount of imperviousness as recommended whenever and wherever a watershed management plan exists.
- Discourage development or redevelopment in Resource Protection Areas (RPA's) and floodplains.
- Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2007 edition, Mount Vernon Planning District, amended through 8-3-2009, page 12:

Environment

The Mount Vernon Planning District includes substantial portions of is located within the watersheds of Cameron Run, Belle Haven, Little Hunting Creek, and Dogue Creek watersheds. In order to restore its streams, meet state and federal water quality standards, and its commitments to clean up the Chesapeake Bay, Fairfax County is developing watershed management plans to reduce pollution due to phosphorous, nitrogen, and sediment flowing into waterways. Plans for the Little Hunting Creek and Cameron Run watersheds are complete and have been adopted by the Board of Supervisors. Plans for the Belle Haven and Dogue Creek watersheds are nearing completion. The watershed plans include specific improvement in stormwater facilities and management, including low impact development practices (LID), projects to restore riparian buffers and streams, outreach and education to improve residents' activities that affect water quality, and recommended changes in Fairfax County policies to promote needed improvements. The plans should be consulted during rezoning and development review processes. The Potomac River shoreline, designated a critical environmental area by the State of Virginia, contains tidal wetlands and estuaries along the shores of Hunting Creek, Little Hunting Creek, and Dogue Creek. This Planning District is within the Coastal Plain geologic province. Consequently, soils are marginal for septic tank usage. Slippage-prone swelling clays underlie most of the district. Any development in areas with these conditions should be based on the latest technologies for stabilizing marine clays from soil slippage. Assurances which protect the County and affected properties should be provided.

The Potomac River shoreline which includes a broad floodplain, tidal wetlands and several small embayments is the most significant environmental feature in the district. Activities that require modifications to the shoreline are regulated by the

Wetlands Board. The Wetlands Board has adopted a policy favoring “living shorelines”, as recommended in the approved watershed management plans. The shoreline and adjacent tributaries are also protected by the regulations of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act.

As growth continues, it is expected that development of environmentally constrained lands will become economically feasible, although environmental constraints will limit their development potential. Future development in this district should also be encouraged to achieve environmental reclamation of degraded environmental quality corridors and other sensitive features.

Older, developed portions of the County often have fair to poor surface water quality. This is due primarily to nonpoint source pollution in the form of runoff which contains high levels of fertilizers, pesticides, sediment and hydrocarbons. Older suburban areas such as the Mount Vernon Planning District do not have the benefit of state-of-the-art water quality practices. Therefore, they are a particular challenge to the County's efforts to improve surface water quality and meet the spirit of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act.”

NOTE: The Plan Map will not change.

ATTACHMENT III
PRELIMINARY STAFF RECOMMENDATION – 09-IV-7MV

Text proposed to be added is shown as underlined, text proposed to be deleted is shown as ~~strike through~~.

Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2007 edition, Mount Vernon Planning District, amended through 8-3-2009, pages 3-4:

MODIFY: Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2007 edition, Mount Vernon Planning District, amended through 8-3-2009, pages 3-4:

“PLANNING OBJECTIVES

Planning objectives in the Mount Vernon Planning District include the following:

- Preserve stable residential neighborhoods through appropriate infill development which is compatible in use, type and intensity with surrounding uses.
- Limit commercial encroachment into stable residential neighborhoods and establish well-defined edges between commercial and residential uses.
- Establish well-defined buffers, particularly for existing residential development adjacent to high density/intensity corridors, with appropriate pedestrian access between commercial and residential areas.
- Establish an appropriate mix of land uses and intensities in the Community Business Centers along Richmond Highway and provide transitions to adjacent Suburban Neighborhoods.
- Encourage pedestrian access to commercial areas and improve the appearance and image of Richmond Highway by addressing issues of functional efficiency, pedestrian safety, aesthetics, streetscaping, tree cover and design by using the urban design principles found in this section.
- Improve and upgrade existing commercial development within the Community Business Centers along the Richmond Highway Corridor to serve as the focus of office buildings, hotel, and other commercial development that encourages the growth of professional employment opportunities and promotes tourism and related activities.
- Encourage improved access to and increased ridership of the transit system.
- Encourage the provision of pedestrian and bicycle facilities to include trails, sidewalks and crosswalks.
- Encourage transit ridership by encouraging appropriate economic development and redevelopment around the Huntington Metro Station.
- Encourage the consolidation of small land parcels to provide for future development opportunities.
- Improve the public’s perception and enjoyment of the environmental and heritage resources of the Mount Vernon area.

- Identify, preserve and promote awareness of heritage resources through research, survey and community involvement.
- Protect environmentally sensitive areas including wetlands, environmental quality corridors, and undeveloped areas within Resource Protection Areas and floodplains. Encourage the restoration of degraded EQCs, RPAs and wetlands.
- ~~Protect wetlands and environmental quality corridors.~~
- Encourage the conservation of existing urban forest assets.
- Encourage the use of low impact development (LID) practices in development and redevelopment projects.
- Encourage reductions in the amount of imperviousness.

Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2007 edition, Mount Vernon Planning District, amended through 8-3-2009, page 12:

Environment

The Mount Vernon Planning District includes substantial portions of ~~is located within the watersheds of~~ Cameron Run, Belle Haven, Little Hunting Creek, and Dogue Creek watersheds. In order to support stream protection and restoration, reduction of pollution flowing into the county's waterways, attainment of state and federal water quality standards, and the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, Fairfax County is developing watershed management plans for all watersheds in the county. The watershed plans include recommendations for specific improvements in stormwater facilities and management, including low impact development (LID) practices, projects to restore riparian buffers and streams, outreach an education to improve residents' activities that affect water quality, and recommended changes in Fairfax County policies to promote needed improvements. The plans should be consulted during reviews of development projects.

The Potomac River shoreline, designated a critical environmental area by the State of Virginia, contains tidal wetlands and estuaries along the shores of Hunting Creek, Little Hunting Creek, and Dogue Creek. This Planning District is within the Coastal Plain geologic province. Consequently, soils are marginal for septic tank usage. Slippage-prone swelling clays underlie most of the district. Any development in areas with these conditions should be based on the latest technologies for stabilizing marine clays from soil slippage. Assurances which protect the County and affected properties should be provided.

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