



**Frequently Asked Questions: Fairfax Forward vs. APR
DRAFT December 6, 2012**

This document provides answers to frequently asked questions about Fairfax Forward, the proposed process to review and amend the Comprehensive Plan. For comparison purposes, responses are provided about the most recent Area Plans Review process (2008-2009 North County and 2009-2010 South County APR Cycle) and Fairfax Forward. The questions are grouped based on topic: public participation, screening, amendment scope, timing, and staffing.

Public Participation:

- When can someone interested in submitting an idea speak with staff? Can someone with an idea for a potential amendment receive preliminary feedback from staff?
 - o APR: During the most recent APR process, staff was available to meet with perspective nominators to answer questions about preparing nominations during the nomination submission period. Telephone conversations and meetings with staff planners were available by appointment.
 - o FFX FWD: Staff will be available to speak to community members about ideas for potential Plan amendments. Telephone conversations and meetings with staff planners will be available by appointment.
- How and when can citizens, property owners, and community groups submit ideas for plan amendments?
 - o APR: During the nomination submission period, which extended typically 5-6 weeks, approximately every four years for each supervisor district.
 - o FFX FWD: During the work program review, there will be public comment period on the draft work program before public hearings, extending approximately four weeks, as well as during the public hearing before the Planning Commission (PC). During individual studies, there will be an opportunity for public comment on the scope of the study.
- Who is eligible to submit an idea for change?
 - o APR: Anyone can submit a nomination to change the Plan.
 - o FFX FWD: Anyone can meet with staff to bring attention to an issue with the current Plan, submit an idea for change during the public comment period on the draft work program, or speak at the public hearing on the draft work program.
- Where does the community fit into the process?
 - o APR: Community members are invited to nominate a proposed plan change, speak to their Supervisor about participating on the appointed citizen task force, or speak at a public hearing.
 - o FFX FWD: Community members are invited to speak with staff about a potential Plan change to be scheduled on the draft work program, speak at the public hearing for the work program adoption, and participate in the public process that will be developed in

- consultation with the Supervisor during the review of individual plan amendment studies.
- How does public education on planning fit into the process?
 - o APR: Planning education was offered to the citizen task force at the start of the task force meetings during the review process.
 - o FFX FWD: General education opportunities will be available, in addition to opportunities during specific studies. General education opportunities will generally take the form of a land use college. Further, planning education will be conducted as part of the public outreach strategy during individual studies.
 - Can staff submit an amendment?
 - o APR: Yes, during the nomination submission period, generally extending for five to six weeks, approximately every four years for each supervisor district.
 - o FFX FWD: Yes, staff will include staff recommendations for studies and for Plan changes within individual studies on the draft work program
 - How will public outreach occur during an amendment or planning study?
 - o APR: Public outreach occurred through a variety of means. Nominators were required to send certified letters to the owners of the nominated property as part of the nomination requirements. As a courtesy, staff also sent letters to the immediate neighbors of nominated properties prior to the task force review and public hearings. In addition to notification letters, Comprehensive Plan listserv announcements were sent out periodically throughout the process announcing milestones, and the guidelines, forms, nominations, staff reports (preliminary and final) were published online. Supervisors' offices may also have published announcements or articles in newsletters.
 - o FFX FWD: Public outreach will occur through a variety of means. At the beginning of a study, staff will work with the Supervisor's office to develop a strategy for public outreach, based on the nature of the study. Further guidance about options for outreach can be found in the draft Public Participation Guidelines.
 - How can the public participate in screening potential amendments/ planning studies?
 - o APR: The Planning Commission reviewed the nominations during a regular Planning Commission meeting.
 - o FFX FWD: The draft work program, listing the studies, anticipated timelines, and preliminary purpose, will be published online for public review and comment, prior to the public hearing before the Planning Commission. Further, the public will be able to speak at the public hearing for the draft work program. Additionally, at the beginning of studies, a public scoping meeting will be held once the existing conditions report is completed to verify the scope reflects community needs and potential changes to land use and intensity.

Screening

- Will proposed amendments be screened prior to evaluation?
 - o APR: Yes. Nominations were screened prior to review. First, county staff determined whether the nomination had satisfied submission requirements and forwarded a recommendation to the Planning Commission. The Commission then decided if a nomination would be included or not in the APR process or deferred for future consideration. A nomination was included in APR if it was determined that it was consistent with adopted County policy and adequate justification has been provided in the nomination form. If a nomination or group of nominations involved a large land area

and/or was highly complex, the Planning Commission may have forwarded the nomination(s) to the Board of Supervisors with a recommendation for a special study.

- FFX FWD: Yes. Proposed planning studies will be screened prior to being scheduled on the work program. First, studies scheduled on the draft work program should:
 - Address emerging community concerns or change in circumstance;
 - Advance major policy objectives, such as promoting environmental protection, revitalizing older residential and commercial areas, preserving open space, providing affordable housing, or balancing transportation and the provision of public facilities with growth and development;
 - Better achieve the Concept for Future Development;
 - Correct inaccuracies or oversights within the text;
 - Reflect implementation or respond to complementary studies; and/or,
 - Work with available staff and community resources.

The draft study work program will be available for public comment. It is anticipated that additional studies will be suggested during the public comment period. Proposals that also meet or can be adjusted to meet the previously mentioned criteria will be scheduled on the work program. The draft work program then will be finalized and forwarded to the Planning Commission for public hearing and adoption.

If additional proposals are brought forward during Planning Commission public hearing or Board members are considering an authorization to be added to the work program outside the public hearing, the amendments should meet the previously mentioned criteria as well. If the additional study would address an urgent community need, respond to a significant change in circumstance, correct an oversight, or achieve a major planning objective to an exceptional degree, then the study should be authorized and scheduled on the work program.

Scope of Amendments:

- What parts of the Comprehensive Plan are eligible for review?
 - APR: Site-specific land use recommendations were eligible for review. Land areas that were the subject of any pending Plan amendment or special studies, land areas with recently amended recommendations, and amendments affecting countywide systems and the Policy Plan were excluded.
 - FFX FWD: All parts of the Plan (Area Plans, Policy Plan, and maps) will be eligible for review. The work program will be based on larger geographic areas such as activity centers studies and neighborhood planning studies, as well as Policy Plan and countywide amendments.
- What types of properties are eligible for proposed amendments? What will the study area of amendments look like?
 - APR: Any property is eligible to be nominated for amendment. There are no minimum or maximum parcel sizes that can be nominated. Subject areas could be less than one acre or an entire planning district.
 - FFX FWD: Any property is eligible to be proposed for an amendment. However, the timing of consideration would be based on the schedule for review, established for the respective Concept for Future Development designation.

- How will the process be organized? How will the county be divided?
 - o APR: The process was organized around the supervisor district boundaries, and the supervisor districts were grouped into the North County and South County.
 - o FFX FWD: The process will be primarily organized around the Concept for Future Development. Review will be grouped into activity center planning that affects the mixed-use centers and industrial areas, and neighborhood planning that affects the low density residential areas, suburban neighborhoods, and large institutional areas on the Concept for Future Development.

- What are the criteria for an amendment to the Plan? What are the criteria for Board-authorized amendments?
 - o APR: Nominators were asked as part of the submission form to explain how the proposed amendments would better achieve the Plan's objectives than the current Plan would or explain how there were oversights or land use related inequities in the currently adopted Plan that would be remedied by the change.
 - o FFX FWD: Proposed amendments, scheduled on the work program will be identified by applying a series of criteria derived from Comprehensive Plan policy and the experience of past planning efforts. The criteria are as follows:
 - Address emerging community concerns or change in circumstance;
 - Advance major policy objectives, such as promoting environmental protection, fostering revitalization of designated areas, preserving open space, providing affordable housing, or balancing transportation infrastructure and public facilities services with growth and development;
 - Better achieve the Concept for Future Development;
 - Correct inaccuracies or oversights within the Plan;
 - Reflect implementation of Comprehensive Plan guidance or respond to recommendations of complementary studies; and/or,
 - Work with available staff and community resources.

If Board members are considering the authorization of an amendment outside of the work program review, the proposal should meet the previously mentioned criteria. If the additional study would address an urgent community need, respond to a significant change in circumstance, correct an oversight, or achieve a major planning objective to an exceptional degree, then the study should be authorized and added to the work program.

Amendment Evaluation:

- Are amendments prioritized?
 - o APR: Proposed amendments were typically reviewed in a uniform manner, except an amendment that involves large land area and/or is highly complex may be deferred into a special study.
 - o FFX FWD: Yes, studies that meet the previously mentioned criteria will be scheduled on the work program. Depending on staff resources, amendments will be listed as either immediate or near-term. Near-term studies will begin as soon as staff resources become available.

- What are the steps for review of an amendment?
 - o APR: Once a nomination passed through screening and was formally accepted for review in APR, Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) staff requested comments from other county agencies and prepared a staff report containing analyses and recommendations for each nomination. Community task forces (or land use committee) appointed by members of the Board of Supervisors also reviewed the nominations and formulated recommendations. Both task force and staff recommendations were transmitted to the Planning Commission (PC) for public hearing. The PC held public hearings to receive testimony about each nomination and made a recommendation to support the nomination as submitted, support an alternative that represents a lesser density or intensity than what has been proposed, deferred if additional evaluation was needed, or deny the nomination. Only nominations that were supported by the PC were forwarded to the Board of Supervisors (BOS) for additional public hearing and final decision. The Comprehensive Plan was amended if the BOS votes to adopt a proposed change.
 - o FFX FWD: Once an amendment or study on the work program begins, DPZ staff will prepare an existing conditions report that provides information on the existing, planned, and zoned potential, and work with the supervisor's office to develop a public participation plan. The plan will outline a strategy to receive public input on the preliminary scope and throughout the study. DPZ staff then will finalize scope, request comments from other county agencies, and prepare a staff report containing analyses and recommendations for the study area. Recommendations may also be developed through public participation activities. Recommendations will be transmitted to the PC for public hearing. The PC will hold a public hearing to receive testimony and make a recommendation to support the amendment, support an alternative, defer if additional evaluation is needed, or deny the amendment. The PC recommendation will be forwarded to the BOS for additional public hearing and final decision. The Comprehensive Plan will be amended if the BOS votes to adopt a proposed change.
- How are the impacts of amendments assessed?
 - o APR: DPZ staff evaluated the amendment and collaborated with other agencies to assess additional impacts, such as the Department of Transportation, Department of Parks and Recreation, Department of Public Schools, Office of Community Revitalization, Department of Public Works and Environmental Services, and other agencies as needed.
 - o FFX FWD: DPZ staff will evaluate impacts and collaborate with other agencies to assess additional impacts, such as the Department of Transportation, Department of Parks and Recreation, Department of Public Schools, Office of Community Revitalization, Department of Public Works and Environmental Services, and other agencies as needed. A major difference is that under Fairfax Forward emphasis will be placed on understanding the cumulative, rather than site specific impacts.
- Will an existing conditions report be completed for amendments?
 - o APR: The existing conditions were assessed based on the particular amendment subject area, and the information was included within the staff report. A formal existing conditions report was not prepared.
 - o FFX FWD: As part of the review process, an existing conditions report will be prepared in land use studies to compare the existing, planned, and zoned potential and provide demographic data.

Timing:

- How frequently does the cycle occur? How long will it take to review the entire Plan?
 - o APR: Completing the review of the North County and South County nominations within the APR process was scheduled to take approximately four years. However, the addition of the Virginia Department of Transportation Chapter 527 review and evolving complexity of nominations (e.g., infill development and mixed-use development at higher intensities) required more detailed evaluation, public participation, and longer timelines. As a result, the timeline for the process extended longer than anticipated, particularly if the nominations were deferred into a special study. A number of North County nominations from the 2008 North County process are still under review in the Reston Special Study, while a number of 2009 South County nominations are still pending. Further, if an amendment was adopted, the subject property was ineligible for review during the next cycle. In this case, reconsideration of Plan guidance would not occur for approximately ten years, if Plan monitoring years were included.
 - o FFX FWD: Completing the review of the work program, using the Concept for Future Development is anticipated to take approximately ten years. This timeline accounts for such necessary activities as Plan monitoring, expanded public outreach, and an improved web presence.
- When can proposals for Plan amendments occur?
 - o APR: The schedule for review was established by the Planning Commission at the beginning of the cycle. However, the nomination submission period for either the North County or the South County generally recurred every four years.
 - o FFX FWD: The schedule for review will be established by the Planning Commission when the work program is adopted. However, the work program will be reviewed and updated, with the opportunities for studies to be added or modified, every two years. In the interim year, a status update of the amendments on the work program will be provided to the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors.
- Will an analysis of the work plan happen annually? (See previous response.)
- What is the timeline for review of amendments? How long will studies take?
 - o APR: The timeline for review depends on the complexity of the studies. More complex nominations, which require more in depth analysis or a Chapter 527 Transportation study, had a longer timeline for review.
 - o FFX FWD: The timeline for review will depend on the complexity of the studies. For example, if the study involves editorial revisions, the length of the study may last six to nine months. However, if the study involves more substantial revisions with detailed analysis and significant public participation efforts, the study may last up to three years.

Legal requirements:

- The Code of Virginia Title 15.2 Chapter 22 states that the local planning commission shall review the Comprehensive Plan at least once every five years to determine whether it is advisable to amend the Plan. How does the review meet the Virginia state code requirement?
 - o APR: The APR cycle recurred every four years. The nomination submission period for magisterial districts was open every four years, within the five year state code statute. Further, the BOS were able to authorize the consideration of an amendment at any time at their discretion. Policy Plan and countywide amendments were not eligible for APR

nominations; however, the BOS could authorize a Policy Plan or countywide amendments at their discretion.

- FFX FWD: The Planning Commission will review the Comprehensive Plan amendment work program every two years. The review of the work program will be informed by ongoing efforts to monitor the Comprehensive Plan, involving the evaluation of countywide Plan recommendations, planned development potential, and Plan implementation. Further, Board-authorized amendments will remain an option to review Plan recommendations, in the interim of the work program review schedule.

Staffing:

- How will staff resources be allocated and managed?
 - APR: Typically, one DPZ staff member was designated as the liaison for each supervisor district and coordinated the review of all nominations within the supervisor district. This allocation was subject to change depending on the volume of nominations. For amendments outside of the APR process, such as Board-authorized amendments, staff resources are allocated as needed.
 - FFX FWD: Staff assignments will be balanced with the number and types of studies on the work program. Specialized support staff will contribute to or lead the review of some studies.