Laurel Hill Park

General Management Plan and Conceptual Development Plan

Prepared for:
Fairfax County Park Authority
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Laurel Hill Park Master Plan

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Report

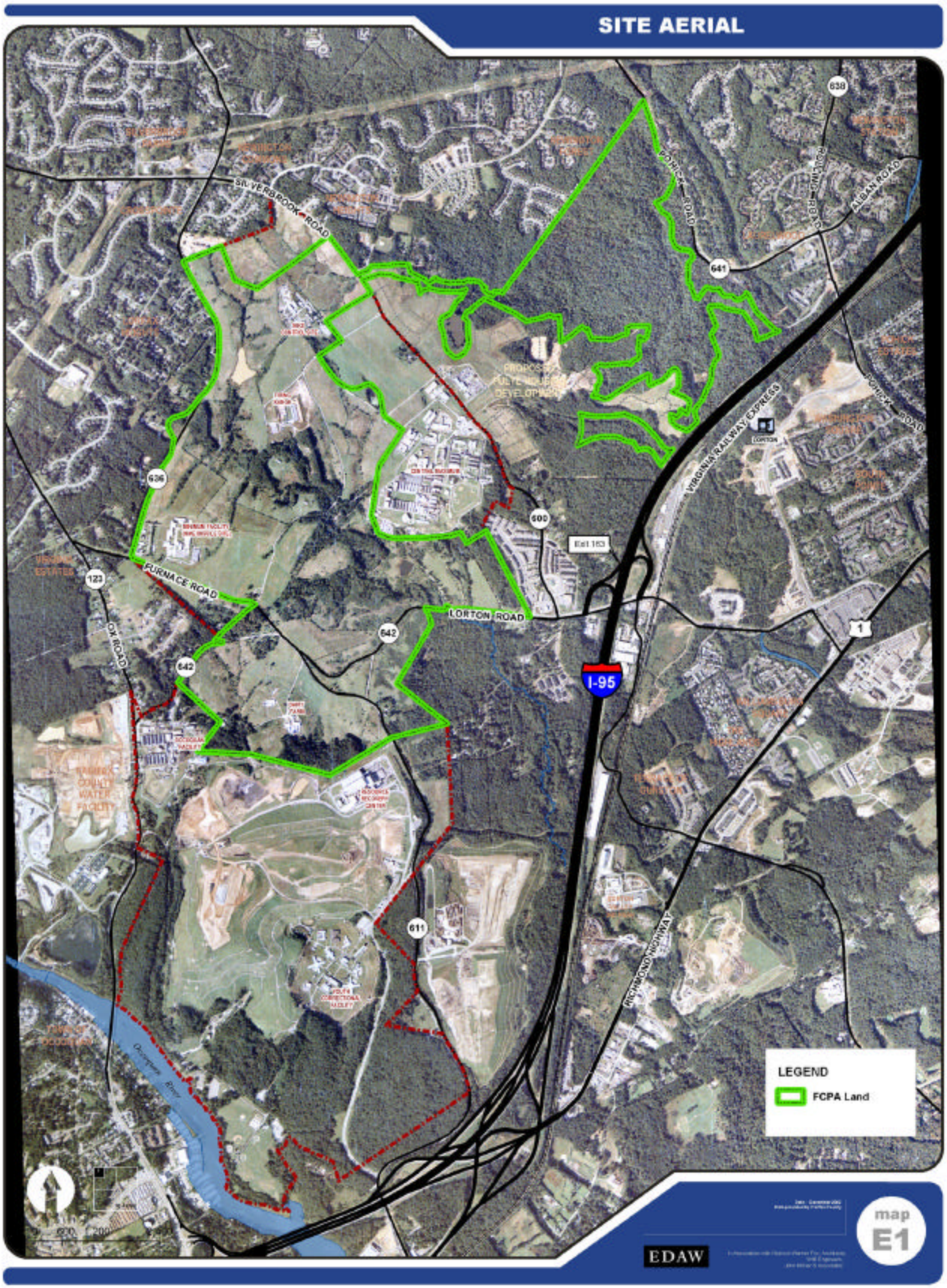
On July 15, 2002 Fairfax County received title to portions of the former D.C. Correctional Facility at Lorton. This transfer was made possible through the Lorton Technical Corrections Act which was passed by Congress in October 1998, which required the county to develop a Reuse Plan that would "maximize use of land for open space, park land, or recreation". Although referred to as "Lorton," the "Lorton Prison" or the "Lorton Reformatory" for most of the 1900s, this site is now referred to as "Laurel Hill" in commemoration of the 18th century structure, which served both as home of William Lindsay, a revolutionary war patriot, and the residence of the Superintendent of the Reformatory, which was built adjacent to the house in 1916.

Laurel Hill Park refers to a portion of the Laurel Hill site, and comprises approximately 1,200, of the nearly 3,200 acres of Laurel Hill. In addition to Laurel Hill Park, the 3,200 acre property also includes three school sites, a redevelopment area (the Spring Hill community), two re-use areas (the Occoquan Workhouse, Reformatory and Penitentiary of the former prison), the I-95 Resource Recovery Facility and landfill, the Vulcan Quarry and the Occoquan Regional Park.

This project is one of the most ambitious planning efforts to date for the Fairfax County Park Authority. The planning process required the coordination and execution of several concurrent activities including land acquisition, master planning, golf course design and construction of interim-use recreation fields within a very restricted schedule as directed by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. The Park Authority is also involved in coordination efforts with other County agencies on multiple planning and maintenance activities in the non-park areas of the site. The Park Authority partnered with Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) for collaborative design ideas and mentoring of students as interns. A unique aspect of the planning effort is the use of the County and Park Authority web sites to keep the public informed of current planning activities and upcoming events. The on-line discussion Park Authority forum allowed citizens to read and react to each other's comments, ask questions, and obtain information from the park planning team. Designed uniquely for this planning process, these coordinated activities and tools provide County citizens new ways to be involved in park planning as we transform this former prison site to a world class park setting.

This Conceptual Development Plan (CDP) describes Laurel Hill Park's existing natural and cultural resources, and outlines a conceptual plan for the reuse of portions of the prison property as parkland. The objective is to provide a framework for the park's future use and to provide a reference for use in the future planning and development of Laurel Hill Park. Figure 1 is an aerial view of the Laurel Hill site showing existing Fairfax County Park Authority land.

Figure 1: Aerial View



2.0 Site and Regional Context

2.1 Regional Context

Laurel Hill Park is strategically positioned to become Fairfax County's largest southern gateway. This is due to its location near the southern-most point of the county and its easy access to Interstate 95 (I-95), the primary north-south transportation corridor connecting the entire eastern coast of the United States. Laurel Hill Park's size and accessibility have substantial implications for Fairfax County and the D.C. Metropolitan Area (Figure 2).

Laurel Hill Park is an important parcel of land within Fairfax County. Its location near several other major open spaces including Fountainhead Regional Park, Sandy Run Regional Park, Occoquan Regional Park, Pohick Regional Park and Mason Neck State Park provide a significant opportunity to create a linked system of trails and open space adjacent to the Occoquan River. By protecting a large portion of this site for parks and open space, the County has provided a major amenity for the growing local and regional population of Fairfax County and surrounding jurisdictions. The site also contains several Environmental Quality corridors (EQC). Laurel Hill Park will ensure these EQCs are protected for future generations to enjoy.

2.2 Site Context

Laurel Hill Park is located in the southeastern portion of Fairfax County, Virginia, and is easily accessed by I- 95, Route 1/ Richmond Highway and Route 123. The site is located less than 15 miles from downtown Washington, D.C. and abuts the D.C. metropolitan area.

The Park is surrounded by several residential neighborhoods to the west, northwest, north and northeast. Industrial and commercial uses can be found throughout the surrounding area. The existing road network accessing Laurel Hill Park consists of a hierarchy of regional routes and local access roads. However, the former use of the site as a penal complex resulted in minimal access points between the property and the adjacent neighborhoods.

Several major roadways surround the park property. Primary access from I-95 is at Lorton Road. Other major roadways near or abutting Laurel Hill Park include Route 1/ Richmond Highway to the east and Route 123 to the west. Laurel Hill Park has direct access to Silverbrook, Hooes, Lorton and Furnace Roads.

The areas directly adjacent to Laurel Hill Park have experienced an increased rate of new development since the closing of the prison. Areas abutting the property can be characterized as low- to medium-density residential, with the area north of the site developed with 2-3 dwelling units per acre. The immediate neighborhoods around Laurel Hill include: Newington Commons, Newington Heights, Newington Forest, Silverbrook Farms, Silverbrook Estates, Lorfax Heights, Crosspointe, and Southpointe Estates. The Lorton "Town Center" is a planned development located to the east of the property at Lorton Road and Route 1. This town center contains the Lorton Station of the Virginia Railway Express (VRE), and is planned to include a mixture of commercial uses, and single- and multi-family residences.

Figure 2: Regional Context

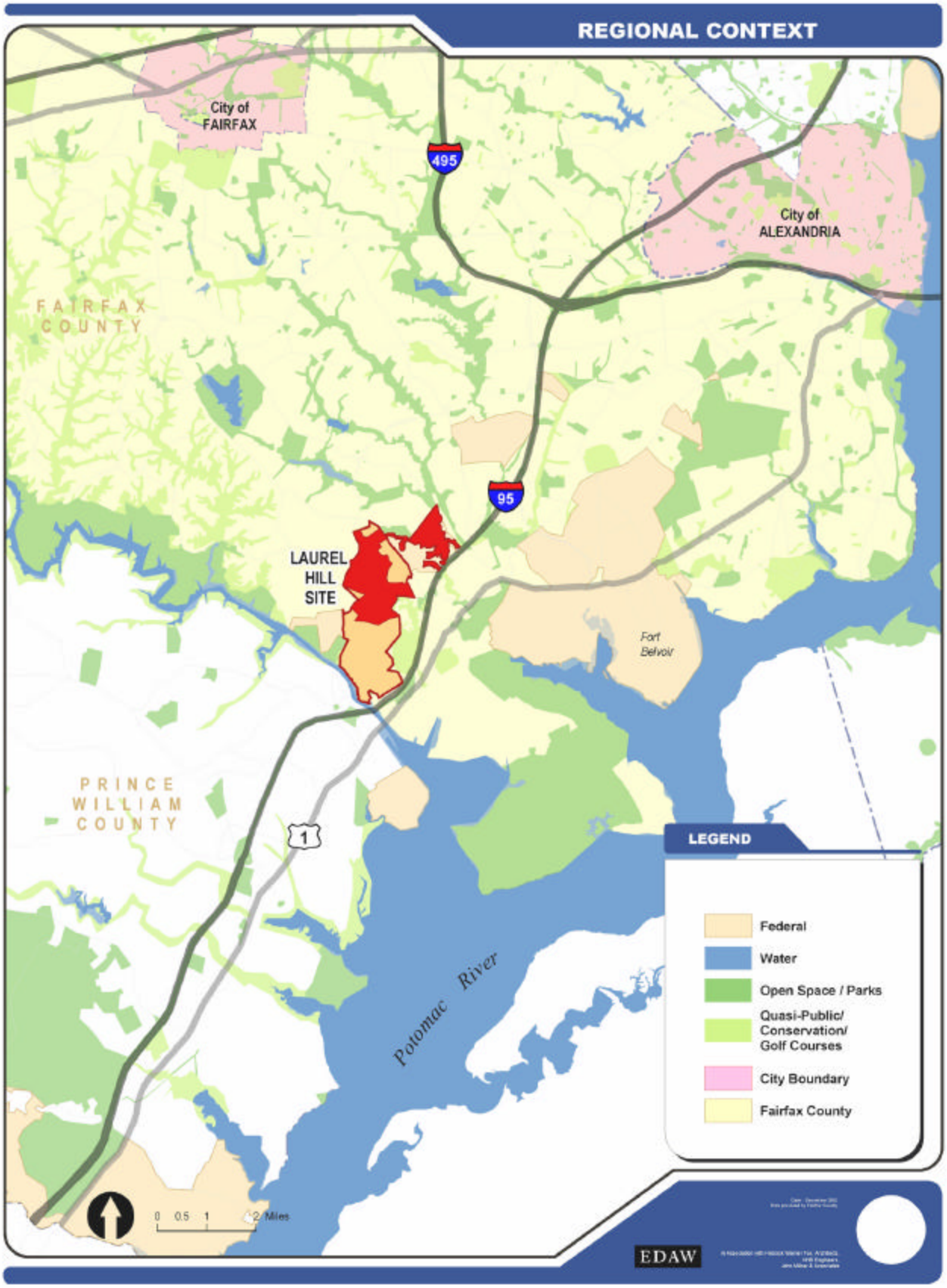
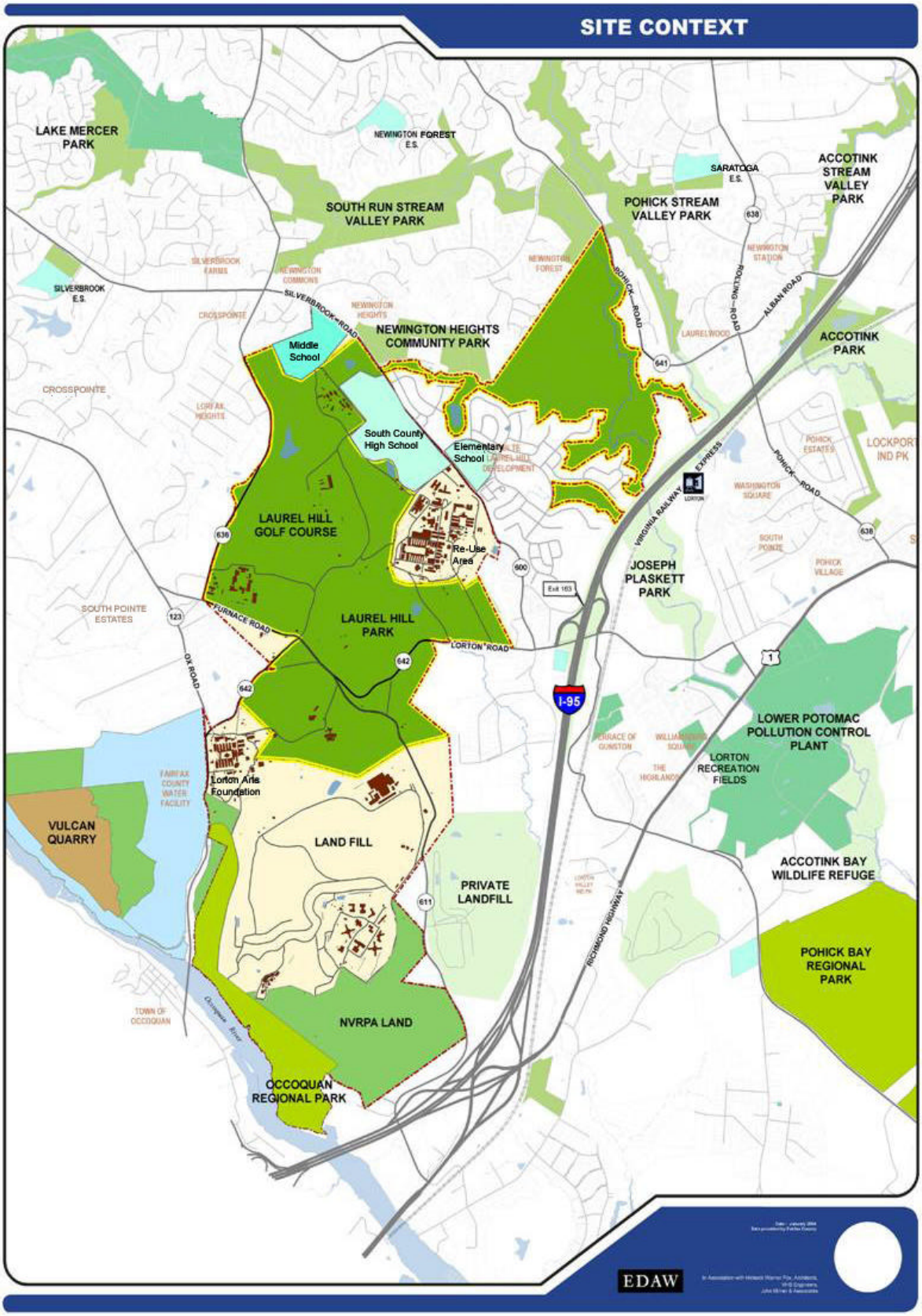


Figure 3: Site Context



contains the Lorton Station of the Virginia Railway Express (VRE), and is planned to include a mixture of commercial uses, and single- and multi-family residences.

The Vulcan Quarry is located to the west of the site, and is referenced in the Comprehensive Plan as part of the larger Laurel Hill site. Once extraction activity ceases at the quarry, it is slated for use by the Fairfax County Park Authority. The Fairfax County Water Authority's Occoquan Water Treatment Facility is also located to the west of Laurel Hill Park.

There are several existing residential amenities and services in the surrounding area. These include the Newington Heights Community Park that abuts the Pulte development on Silverbrook Road. A private recreation center located at the intersection of South Run and Pohick Road provides a community swimming pool and tennis facilities. Service and convenience retail can be found on the eastern side of the site near the intersection of Lorton and Silverbrook Roads, including a convenience store/ gas station, fast food, deli, Comfort Inn Hotel and other services. At the intersection of Silverbrook and Hooes Roads is a "Village Shops" complex, which also provides retail and services. Additional commercial services, such as fast food, big box retail, and professional services are located in Prince William County south of the site.

Other features near Laurel Hill Park include the Town of Occoquan, Occoquan Regional Park, the Occoquan Water Treatment Facility, the Vulcan Quarry, the Resource Recovery Facility, proposed Re-Use Areas, South Run Stream Valley Park and the VRE commuter rail line.

2.3 Overview of the Site

The 3,200 acre property is referred to in the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan as LP1- Laurel Hill Community Planning Sector 1. Public lands within this planning sector were divided into several distinct portions for oversight and planning purposes; the Fairfax County Park Authority portion; the Fairfax County area (including the redevelopment and re-use area), and the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority. Laurel Hill Park consists of approximately 1,200 acres.

Laurel Hill Park is situated north of the Occoquan River, west of I- 95, and east of Route 123 (Ox Road). Lorton Road (Route 642), Furnace Road, (Route 611), Silverbrook Road (Route 600), Hooes Road (Route 636), and Pohick Road (Route 641) make up the network of roads accessing the site. Private access roads associated with the former prison provide additional access within the site (see Figure 3).

The majority of the park is characterized by undeveloped open space. The northern section of park land is a heavily wooded natural resource area. The southern section of the park is primarily comprised of recently abandoned agricultural land with a series of wooded creeks and valleys (see Figure 4). Additional features within the parkland include the former Nike Missile Control and Launch Sites.

Laurel Hill Park is bordered by a series of structures and features, most of which are associated with the former prison complex. These include the Central/Max facility (former Penitentiary, Reformatory and ancillary facilities), the redevelopment area (proposed Spring Hill Senior Center) and the Occoquan Workhouse (proposed Lorton Arts Foundation). These facilities were constructed

over different periods as the prison evolved and required expansion. In addition to these facilities, there are three other sites; the Occoquan Regional Park, the I-95 Energy Resource Recovery Facility and adjacent landfill operated by Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Resources; located south of the park.

A 280 acre public golf course is being developed within the park area as part of the South County High School development agreement. Existing residential neighborhoods and the South County High School border the site and make up part of the surrounding community. A new middle school is also planned adjacent to the park.

2.4 History and Background of the 3,200 Acre Property

Laurel Hill House

Laurel Hill was the name of the circa 1766 home and plantation of William Lindsay, a Revolutionary War patriot. The structure was subsequently used as the home of the Superintendent of the Reformatory upon its creation adjacent to the Laurel Hill House in 1916. Despite the poor condition of the house, it remains intact as a contributing structure to the Lorton Prison Historic District. The house is not currently located on park property,

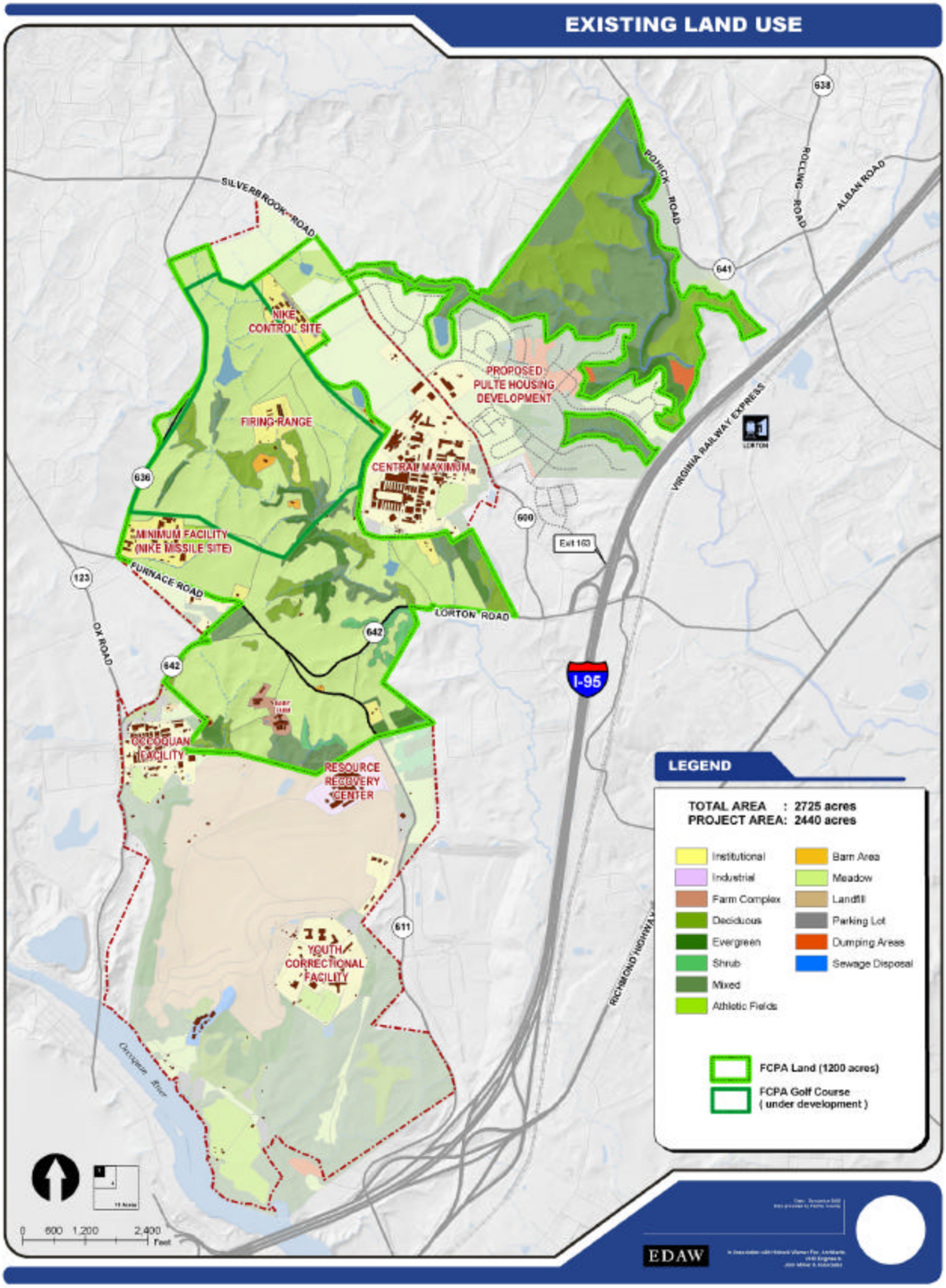
Progressive Era

The early 20th century brought new approaches to detention facilities throughout the country. Theodore Roosevelt's involvement in a new approach to rehabilitating bootleggers and horse thieves led to a movement that influenced correctional practices and penal design nationwide. Lorton Prison was commissioned by Theodore Roosevelt in response to the deplorable penal conditions in the District of Columbia. The philosophy behind the new prison was based in treating inmates as legitimate members of society: rehabilitation through the dignity of a hard day's work as well as education and sports. Part of the vision was that the Lorton model acted as a self-sustaining village in its activities. Evidence of these activities still mark the land today, and the former farmlands, dairy, slaughterhouse, blacksmith shop, sawmill, and barns remain vacant where sustenance once thrived. Prisoners worked to harvest the land; farming their own foods, and raising their own animals. Prisoners slept in dormitories rather than cell-blocks and were not confined by walls and guard towers. The prison' physical layout resembled a campus village rather than a prison, with colonial red-brick buildings and arched doorways oriented around grassy courtyards. The classically-inspired, symmetrical dormitory complexes at the center of the Workhouse and Reformatory make allusions through their architecture to order and tradition. The focus on labor and education, along with a campus-style layout that provided fresh air and natural light, hallmarked a progressive approach that made the Lorton system revolutionary among prisons in the nation.

The Beehive Kiln is a lasting reminder of the industrious practices of the prison. Early on, inmates fired bricks from clay extracted from the prison land. Bricks and stones fired in the kiln were used in additions to colonial style buildings and for the construction of on-site roads.

As the District of Columbia grew, and the demands of the correctional complex increased, the prison expanded and required heightened levels of security. Though the Progressive Era principles and

Figure 4: Existing Land Use



minimized security practices were displaced by the evolving inmate population, the physical patterns of the progressive era continued to influence additions to the facility and exist on the site today

Prison Agriculture and Industry

Progressive Era principles also encouraged sustainability and self-sufficiency of the prison. The prison engaged in industry (e.g., blacksmithing and brick firing), and agriculture and husbandry through the prison farm, dairy and slaughterhouse. The Workhouse (Occoquan Facility) was an agricultural work camp, and its many farming structures served as the setting for prison labor and production. During the early years, inmates worked the land and produced bricks in the prison kilns for on-site buildings and stone for onsite roads. Other industries were also attempted, such as re-treading tires, making manhole covers, and knitting sweaters. The prison was intended to be self-sufficient, and while this may never have been fully achieved, the extensive agricultural operations, including cultivated fields; pasture land; a poultry farm; hog ranch; slaughterhouse; dairy; blacksmith shop; sawmill; and feed, hay, and storage barns hint at the extent to which the prison was capable of maintaining itself. Much of the current park area is comprised of land that was formerly used for agriculture and husbandry, contributing to the park's historic significance.

Lorton Prison and the Women's Suffrage Movement

Lorton Prison became known as the prison that housed Suffragettes arrested during protests for women's voting rights in the early 20th century. The protests occurred in 1917 during World War I when the Suffragettes marched to the White House in peaceful demonstration in an attempt to persuade Congress to give women the right to vote. They carried banners that read "How Long Must American Women Wait for Their Liberty?" and "Mr. President, What Will You Do For Woman Suffrage?" Seen as slanderously unpatriotic during wartime, groups of women protesters, many from the National Woman's Party, were incarcerated in Lorton's "Women's Workhouse" (Occoquan Workhouse) located along Route 123. Additional arrests were made during subsequent protests and sentences lasted up to sixty days.

Although the women's workhouse no longer exists and was not located on what is now the parkland, the movement represents a significant historic event that should be venerated as part of the prison's history.

Nike Missile Site

During World War II, the U.S. military began to experiment with missiles and rockets in response to the German rocket program. The NIKE Missile sites were part of the first nationwide U.S. air defense system designed to protect against a Soviet nuclear attack. In the 1950s, they were highly visible, powerful symbols of U.S. military power and reminders of the Soviet threat. The Nike sites were the outgrowth of an increasing concern over the Soviet ability to equip jet aircraft with nuclear bombs, and continued to develop into an early defense against Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs).

Due to the increasing tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and as a result of the Korean War, the Army endorsed a nationwide surface to air missile (SAM) defense system in 1951.

Tensions became heightened in response to successful hydrogen bomb tests by both the Soviet Union and the United States in 1953. In that year, the Army created selection boards responsible for land acquisition and construction oversight (Bright 1997:323; USACE 1997:5-6). By the summer of 1953, Douglas and Bell were producing missiles and equipment, as well as training soldiers to operate the new missile system that was christened NIKE after the Greek goddess of victory. Later, it was given the name NIKE-Ajax. Land acquisition became an onerous procedure of conflict and condemnation proceedings in some areas but land acquisition at the sites in Fairfax County was not difficult. The Army was required to use government-owned land whenever possible. This probably made the decision to locate at least part of the site at the D.C. Department of Corrections in Lorton a simple one. In October 1953, the Army obtained the use of two sections totaling 30 acres of the Lorton Prison complex. Due to the size of the tract acquired by the Army, the Lorton site was made a "double site" that had six magazines, rather than the standard three, and twice the normal staff (Bright 1997:329). Work at the Lorton site began in March 1954, and was complete enough to become the national showpiece for the Army's public unveiling of the nationwide NIKE program in 1955. Due to its proximity and size, it was labeled the "National NIKE Site" by the Secretary of the Army, and was host to visits by numerous foreign dignitaries as well as national and local politicians, and even local residents (Bright 1997:329-331).

Beginning in 1958, the Virginia National Guard began training to take over the Fairfax site and the Ajax portion of the Lorton site. The Virginia National Guard consistently set records for performance in training exercises. By 1960, the Army closed the Ajax sites due to their prohibitive operating costs. On August 30, 1963, the National Guard took control of Lorton, and only a small contingent of Army personnel continued to work at the site (Bright 1997:344; USACE 1997:7). During the 1960s, the political and defense climate changed, necessitating a change in strategic defense operations. The Soviet Union began to increase their supply of ICBMs and decrease their dependence on long range bombers. Accordingly, the United States decided to focus on the construction of strategic nuclear weapons. Therefore, the NIKE Missile site at Lorton was closed in 1974. The former NIKE Launch site is located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Hooes and Furnace Roads. The former NIKE Control site is located near the western edge of the Park just south of Silverbrook Road.

Federal Disposal of the Lorton Reservation

The disposal of the property was initiated by two congressional acts in an effort to minimize federal expenditure. The first act was the *National Capitalization Revitalization and Self-Government Improvement Act of 1997*, which directed the initial disposal of segments of the prison facilities. Subsequently, the *District of Columbia Management Reform Act of 1997* mandated the termination of penal activities and the closing of the complex. The title was transferred after the closing of the former District of Columbia Correctional Complex ("Complex"), which ceased operations in 2001.

Over the past 30 years, portions of the Complex had been conveyed to different public agencies and entities for different uses:

- In 1973, over 800 acres were apportioned among Fairfax County, the District of Columbia, and the Metropolitan Washington Waste Management Agency for the I-95 Energy/ Resource Recovery Facility and solid waste landfill;

- In 1998, the Federal government conveyed 147 acres to the Fairfax County Water Authority; and

- In 1998, pursuant to the *1998 Lorton Technical Corrections Act*, the General Services Administration acquired the Lorton Reservation from the District of Columbia and following a Memorandum of Agreement, 2,324 acres of the property were transferred to Fairfax County.

Since the 1998 Federal decision to close the prison, Fairfax County has completed several significant steps. In 1999, a local citizens committee prepared a re-use plan. In July of that year, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors adopted their plan as the official Re-use Plan and Comprehensive Plan Amendment. Subsequently, the remaining 2,324 acres were transferred to Fairfax County on July 15, 2002 at a cost of $4.2 million. The former Lorton Reservation was renamed "Laurel Hill" by Fairfax County in commemoration of the historic home of the revolutionary war patriot, William Lindsay.

2.5 Existing Policy and Land Use Framework

The Comprehensive Plan for LP1 – Laurel Hill Community Planning Sector describes a planning framework for the re-use areas, the park land, and their abutting properties, such as the Vulcan Quarry, comprising a total of nearly 3,200 acres. Existing land uses within the original site boundary include the former Lorton Prison facilities, publicly owned open space, and a system of local access roads (see Figure 4). The southern section of the property includes the existing I-95 Land Fill and the I-95 Energy Resource Recovery Facility. The former Nike Missile Launch and Control sites are also located on the property and have been identified for potential re-use.

Comprehensive Plan

The Laurel Hill property was transferred to Fairfax County upon adoption of a revised Comprehensive Plan to include the development of the site (see Figures 5 and 6). The Comprehensive Plan identifies 3,200 acres at Laurel Hill to be included in a re-use plan. The disposal of the property was subject to regulations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) due to its history, environmental qualities, and prior federal ownership. According to the revised plan, only a portion of the land located south Silverbrook Road, was identified for redevelopment for private, commercial use. This area is currently being developed as an age –restricted residential neighborhood with housing for seniors. The majority of the remaining parcels land units are designated for adaptive re-use of historic and non-historic buildings (approximately 140 acres), parkland and open space (approximately 1,600 acres), high school and middle school sites (approximately 120 acres), and existing uses such as the continued operation of the Resource Recovery Facility and adaptive re-use of a former landfill (approximately 500 acres).

The revised Comprehensive Plan includes guidelines for the redevelopment and re-use activities at Laurel Hill. The Plan strives to optimize natural resource areas to preserve open space and promote redevelopment and re-use that will be compatible with community needs and surrounding areas.

Figure 5: Comprehensive Plan – Land Use

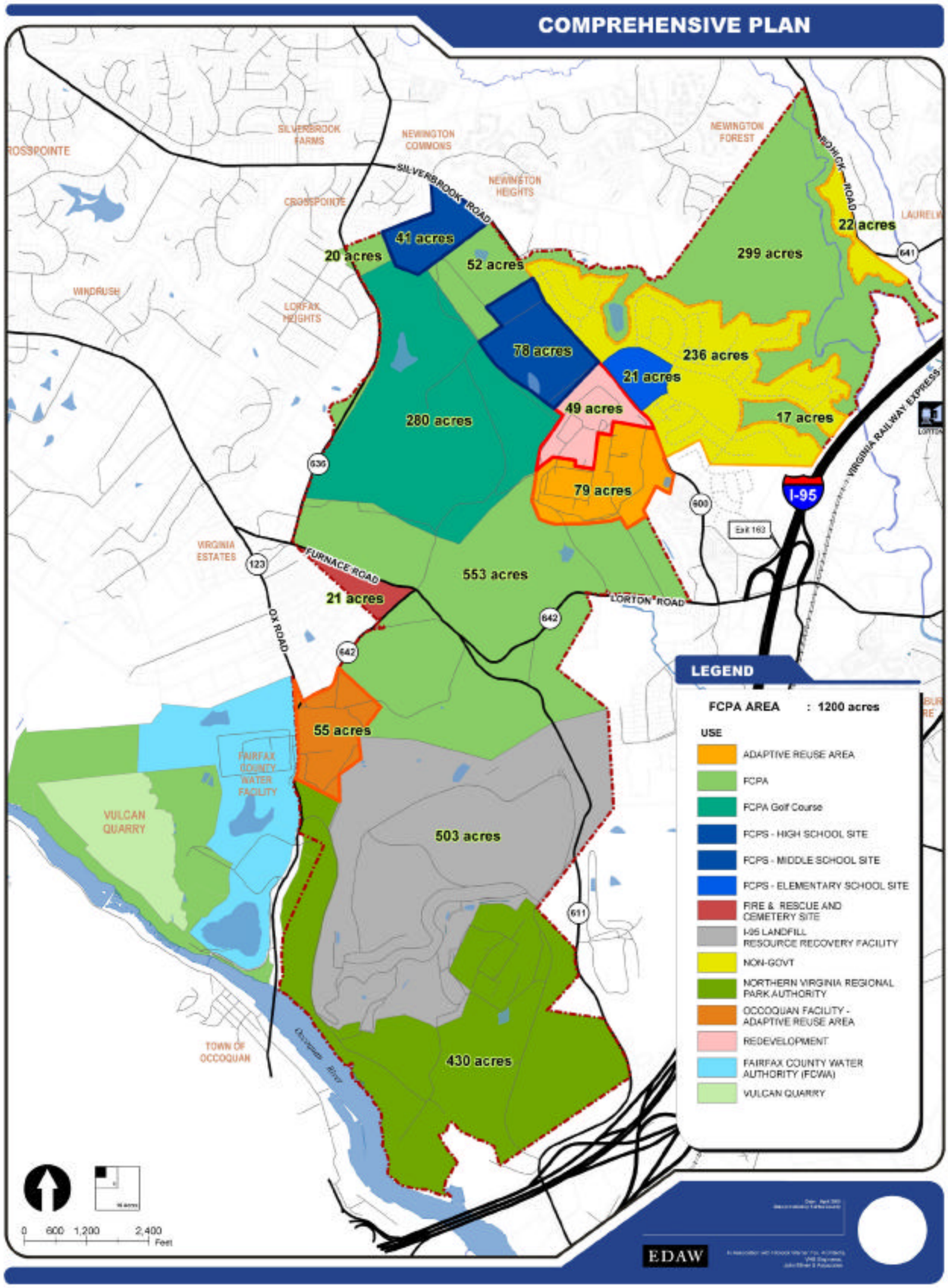
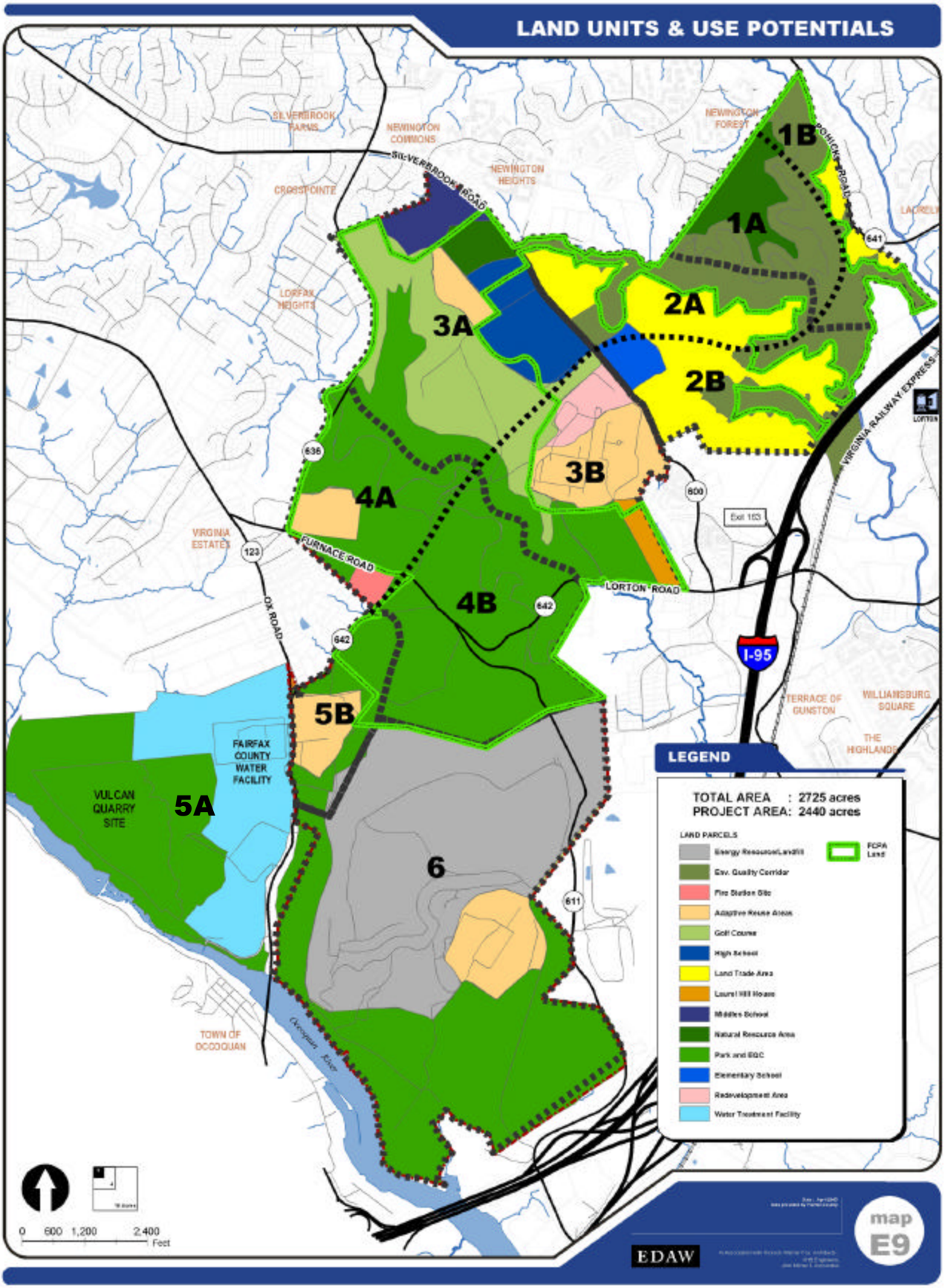


Figure 6: Comprehensive Plan- Land Units



Potential Uses

The Comprehensive Plan categorizes the Laurel Hill property as a series of Land Units and Sub-units. The recommended land uses are identified for each of these Land Units and are listed as follows (see Figure 6):

LAND UNIT 1: (235 acres)
Sub-Unit 1A

- **Countywide Natural Resources**
  - Parks
  - Trails
  - Wildlife observation areas
  - Interpretive center

Sub-unit 1B

- **Countywide Natural Resources**
  - Parks
  - Trails
  - Wildlife observation areas
  - Interpretive center
- Laurel Hill Greenway
- Single family detached residential use at a density of 1-2 dwelling units per acre

LAND UNIT 2: (370 acres)
Sub-unit 2A

- Single family detached residential use at a density of 2-3 dwelling units per acre
- Re-use of transportation facility as an elementary school site
- Laurel Hill Greenway

Sub-unit 2B

- Residential use at densities of 2-3, 4-5 and 8-12 dwelling units per acre
- Amtrak Station and open space east of I-95
- Laurel Hill Greenway

LAND UNIT 3: (610 acres)
Sub-unit 3A

- Community and County-wide park
- Public golf-course (minimum 165 acres)
- Middle school
- High school
- Recreational facilities & open space
- Natural Resource Areas
- Nike and Administration Building Heritage Resource Site

Sub-unit 3B

- Redevelopment area
  - Graduate care facility for the elderly (with supportive commercial/ retail)
- Adaptive re-use areas
  - Governmental and non-hospital institutions
  - Laurel Hill House Heritage Resource Area within Countywide Park
- Laurel Hill Greenway

LAND UNIT 4: (470 acres)

Sub-unit 4A

- District Park with Nike Launch Site Heritage Resources site and active recreation facilities
- Public facilities
  - Fire station
  - Cemetery
- Laurel Hill Greenway
- Recreational/Community Center as interim use at Minimum Security Facility

Sub-unit 4B

- District park with special purpose areas:
  - Horticulture center
  - Athletic fields
  - Equestrian center
  - Laurel Hill Greenway

LAND UNIT 5: (590 acres)

Sub-unit 5A

- Vulcan Quarry
- Fairfax County Water Authority
- Early 20th Century Cemetery

Sub-unit 5B

- Occoquan facility:
  - Governmental, cultural, arts and public institutional uses.
  - Former livestock barn to be used for community activities
- Laurel Hill Greenway

LAND UNIT 6: (900 acres)

- I-95 Resource Recovery Facility and Landfill
- Occoquan Regional Park