

## 1. LAND USE

### **Board of Supervisor’s Environmental Vision:**

*“The county will continue to refine and implement land use policies and regulations that accommodate anticipated growth and change in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable and equitable manner while revitalizing older commercial centers, protecting existing stable neighborhoods, supporting sustainability and supporting a high quality of life. The development priority will be mixed use, pedestrian and bicycle-friendly transit-oriented development in activity centers. Policies and regulations will result, throughout the county, in the development and enhancement of vibrant and vital pedestrian and bicycle-friendly places where people want to live, work, shop, play, learn and thrive in a healthy environment, ensuring the protection, enhancement and restoration of natural resources, and the provision, in building and site designs, for the efficient use of resources.”<sup>1</sup>*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Fairfax County covers approximately 395 square miles with over 1.1~~8572~~ million residents and ~~418422,84600~~ households<sup>1</sup>. As the population has grown and the county has transitioned toward a more urban environment, the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan and the decision-making processes for how land is used have also evolved. When the first Environmental Vision was adopted in 2004, the county was fast approaching “build-out,” whereby little vacant or undeveloped land was available. To continue growing after build-out, the focus of land use across the county shifted from new development to revitalization and redevelopment. The county is now well into that transformation and significant development continues to provide new jobs and housing. These changes allow the county to continue to grow and prosper within a finite environmental footprint and have the potential to improve negative environmental impacts from older projects.

### **Historical Perspective**

Fairfax has gone through several generations of planning, from the original farmland into the complex county in which we live. The 2019 EQAC Annual Report on the Environment (ARE) documents the major steps starting with the 1970’s decision to “thwart the negative effects of rapid urbanization by spending eighteen months and \$1.5 million on a planning program to control the rate and direction of future growth.” The legacy continued into the 1980s when the Board took action to protect the Occoquan watershed. More than 38,500 acres of property were down-zoned from one-acre to five-acre development, “citing a study that predicted the Occoquan reservoir could turn into a smelly swamp if some action is not taken.” Through the 1990s and 2000s, the focus was the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act and Ordinance that codified Resource

<sup>1</sup> Demographic Reports 202~~32~~, County of Fairfax, Virginia

Protection Areas (RPAs) and defined them using perennial streams as the ecological basis for protecting land from development.

With build-out, it has become more challenging to protect large parts of the county's ecosystem. The challenge for planning is most evident with the Tysons transformation that reimagined a primarily single-use shopping and work district into a 24-7 livable community. The Tysons plan is supporting future growth that supports "live, work, and play", as well as incorporating stream restoration and stormwater management to address stormwater runoff, along with equities such as access to natural spaces for parks and recreation. The key to creating a vibrant, desirable, and healthy future community is applying a holistic lens that equally values business, social, cultural, and environmental priorities.

### **CURRENT STATUS AND CONCERNS**

In 2024 the finite land of Fairfax is being stressed in dimensions not even imagined in the 1980s. Climate change is driving more efficient energy consumption as well as demanding higher resiliency of the built environment. Population growth is driving housing growth, development density, and urban amenities over open parkland. Economic growth is encouraging large data centers that bring industrial scale energy and water consumption with neighborhood concerns of noise, pollution, and attractiveness. The county is also focusing on equity through the One Fairfax Policy and the recommendations from the Chairman's Taskforce on Equity & Opportunity.

These factors compete with traditional environmental concerns of clean air and water, storm water management, and natural biodiversity that dominated land use planning of prior generations. The tools used to make land use decisions are the Comprehensive Plan and in particular the Policy Plans. The County is in the midst of **Plan Forward** a comprehensive update to the Policy Plan. The most pressing land use challenges in 2023 are global climate change and dealing with multiple divergent priorities on land including equity, resilience, and tax revenue diversity. The county signed the Carbon Neutral Counties Declaration to become carbon neutral in its energy use for government operations by 2040<sup>2</sup> and accepted the Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP)'s goals to reduce the community's greenhouse gas emissions by half by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2050<sup>3</sup>. Resilient Fairfax was adopted in 2022. The county is also focusing on equity through the One Fairfax Policy and the recommendations from the Chairman's Taskforce on Equity & Opportunity, which took into account the direction noted in the Countywide Strategic Plan and Economic Recovery Framework<sup>4</sup>. These topics were not central to prior generational considerations yet are critical to today's holistic considerations for using land.

Formatted: Font: Bold

The county is also making decisions to enhance economic development opportunities of land. One example is allowing development in the Dulles Airport Noise Impact Overlay

Formatted: Font: (Default) Arial, Font color: Auto

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/news/fairfax-county-commits-carbon-neutral-energy-use-2040>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/environment-energy-coordination/climate-planning-action>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/sites/boardofsupervisors/files/assets/meeting-materials/2021/sept21-budget-chairman-task-foree-recommendations-and-actions.pdf>

## 1. LAND USE

District. This district allows development that was deemed inappropriate in the past due to concerns with the loud airplane landing<sup>5</sup> noise. Specifically, as noted in the Staff Report:

~~“The FAA has adopted DNL 65 dBA as the threshold of significant noise exposure. ... The consideration of new residential uses within the 60-65 DNL airport noise contour area ..., could, with appropriate noise mitigation, enhance economic development opportunities, provide additional housing, and provide opportunities for residents to live and work in a mixed use area with reasonable commutes along the Route 28, I-66, and Dulles Tollway corridors. Allowing new residential uses within the 60-65 DNL airport noise contour area would also allow the conversion of under-performing, single use, non-residential uses, such as office parks, into residential and mixed use developments with a mix of amenities that could keep these areas economically viable.”~~

Formatted: Normal

~~Another example is encouraging data centers to be built which consume large amounts of space and energy and generate significant revenue without traditional employment increases. These energy intensive industrial uses were not a consideration of prior comprehensive plans.~~

Formatted: Font: (Default) Arial, Font color: Auto

~~EQAC is also following One Fairfax and supports recommendations from the Strategic Plan & Economic Recovery Framework Alignment Matrix<sup>6</sup>. In particular:~~

Formatted: Add space between paragraphs of the same style

~~Recommendation 16: Develop, pilot, and institute Fairfax County equity based decision making tools for planning, projects, decision making and resource allocation. Strategic element EEG 12: Implement a workplace culture change effort to actively promote equity and inclusion, collaboration, excellence, innovation, customer service, transparency, accountability, and trustworthiness.~~

Formatted: Normal

~~EQAC is concerned that the tools used to make land use decisions, namely the Comprehensive Plan, especially the Policy Plans, do not fully incorporate these new concerns. EQAC supports the Plan Forward goals to:~~

Formatted: Indent Left: 0", Add space between paragraphs of the same style

- ~~1. Review, update, and streamline existing Policy Plan elements.~~
- ~~2. Add new Policy Plan elements as needed; and~~
- ~~3. Ensure the Policy Plan is in alignment with the Countywide Strategic Plan, the One Fairfax Policy, and other recently adopted policies and initiatives.~~

~~EQAC is also tracking changes in the Zoning Ordinance that are the detailed rules for building in the County. The Parking Reimagined update engendered significant debate and the results are just coming thru the development pipeline, so it is too early to draw any conclusions about the impacts.~~

~~The harsh reality we face is that these many competing elements demand more complex decisions on how to grow into the future. The Comprehensive Plan and~~

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/planning-development/plan-amendments/airport-noise-policy>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/topics/sites/topics/files/assets/documents/pdf/july%2029-%2021%20memo%20to%20bes.pdf>

Zoning ordinance policies encode the values used for making decisions. In a sense the additional complexity means every factor has diluted importance, and there is debate about how to best prioritize competing values.

EQAC has long been a champion of holistic planning, whereby all factors are considered together to reach a decision. Over the past 4 years, EQAC has also recommended a new concept to consider environmental impacts of development: **net environmental benefit**. We continue to stress this concept as a first principle when considering the many factors in land use planning. It is a way to cut across divergent factors that clearly states our desire to improve environmental benefit in all land use decisions.

We are encouraged that the county adopted the Policy Plan Amendment, 2022 CW-2CP, to update the Policy Plan elements, add new Policy Plan elements as needed and ensure the Policy Plan is in alignment with the Countywide Strategy Plan, and other relevant policies and initiatives. These policies encode the values used for making decisions across divergent priorities. The Policy Plan elements need a comprehensive review incorporating new priorities along with a rubric that appropriately expresses Fairfax land use values.

#### Holistic Development Process

EQAC has long been a ~~steadyn~~ advocate for holistic planning processes that bring all county and private concerns together as changes to the Comprehensive Plan and new developments are considered. This approach is more effective than opportunistic plans based on single parcels that were effective before the county was fully built-out. The current Site-Specific Plan Amendment (SSPA) Process combines holistic planning with opportunistic development proposals. EQAC commends the County for ~~recommends a completing~~ 10-year review of the State of the Plan to assess the prior and current processes to make sure the planning process is delivering the vision for development across the county. ~~This report is currently underway and will be the first step in reviewing how the Comprehensive Plan and Policy Plans have been meeting their intended goals. The report was published in January 2024. The report has been delayed until 2024 to include analysis of development through 2024.~~

The holistic approach that evolved as the county approached build-out must now consider additional dimensions for conserving energy and align with an equitable and sustainable future. One of the first Comprehensive Plan updates to face this additional complexity was the Reston Comprehensive Plan update<sup>7</sup> which was adopted in September 2023. The Reston Task Force had to consider new business and lifestyle models necessitated by Covid-19 along with climate change and rapid technological changes. Sections in the Plan highlight environmental stewardship, equity, affordable housing, health, heritage, and art.

#### Net Environmental Benefit

The most important environmentally sensitive areas are called out specifically in the Chesapeake Bay Agreement. These are the Resource Protection Areas (RPAs) defined

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.reston.org/reston-comprehensive-plan>

Formatted: Font: (Default) Times New Roman, Bold

by the stream valleys, the Resource Management Areas(RMA's) that border the RPA and have steep slopes and fragile soil, and Environmental Quality Corridors (EQC). Development in these areas is highly constrained and any potential development must show a significant net environmental benefit. This approach has been very effective to protect land with high value in a natural state. EQAC has been advocating for a similar concept to be created for open and infill development and potentially for redevelopment

Discussions with the Planning Commission and Staff about using net-environmental benefit have been positive but raised concerns about how to realize such a policy. The current approach for new development is to define development standards and verify projects to be minimally compliant. While this is a clear standard, it does not align with improving our community. As the Policy Plans are being revised, they need to be designed to show improvement along the priority elements, not simply turned into minimum standards.

EQAC is recommending that the County initiate a process to understand net environmental benefit. The process should:

1. Define metrics to assess environmental performance. Some metrics are coming from CECAP e.g. green buildings (see Climate Action Dashboard) and can be derived from the Fairfax Environmental Vision
2. Baseline those metrics across different land categories. Use the factors for RPA, RMA, and EQC as a model, but consider all types of open space and infill areas.
3. Pilot metrics to measure net benefit. These should assess the environmental quality of a project before and after implementation.
4. Explore ways for DPZ to track metrics and compare across projects.
5. Explore options to incorporate net-environmental benefit into the policy plan update.

It is also important to understand how current projects are performing. Not all projects simply follow minimal standards. The county should track projects and highlight when a development goes above and beyond current county standards for rezoning and special exception.

#### Development Pressures

The 2019 EQAC ARE included a discussion of development pressures that were having a negative effect on the environment. EQAC supports development as part of a holistic process that balances growth with environmental protection and other elements of a healthy community. EQAC specifically called out the need for a development policy that calls for a **not environmental benefit** across all new projects. Currently, net benefit is defined for environmental corridors and RPAs, but the concept can be generalized to apply to all new development. This is quite appropriate for redevelopment where prior development had minimal protections and redevelopment can fix prior issues.

The 2019 EQAC ARE<sup>1</sup> also listed several cases where negative environmental effects occurred on fragile land that was approved for development. This is caused by land values increasing past the point where unsuitable land that is slated for development is

Formatted: List Paragraph, Numbered + Level: 1 + Numbering Style: 1, 2, 3, ... + Start at: 1 + Alignment: Left + Aligned at: 0.25" + Indent at: 0.5"

Formatted: Font: (Default) Arial

Formatted: Normal, Space After: 0 pt, Line spacing: single, No bullets or numbering

Formatted: Font: (Default) Arial

Formatted: Font: (Default) Arial

Formatted: Font: (Default) Times New Roman

Formatted: Normal

engineered so that it meets the bare minimum of the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning regulations. However, this ignores the ecological significance of these fragile lands. When looked at holistically, there is no justification for allowing inappropriate development. However, staff have told EQAC the criterion for such cases is minimum compliance.

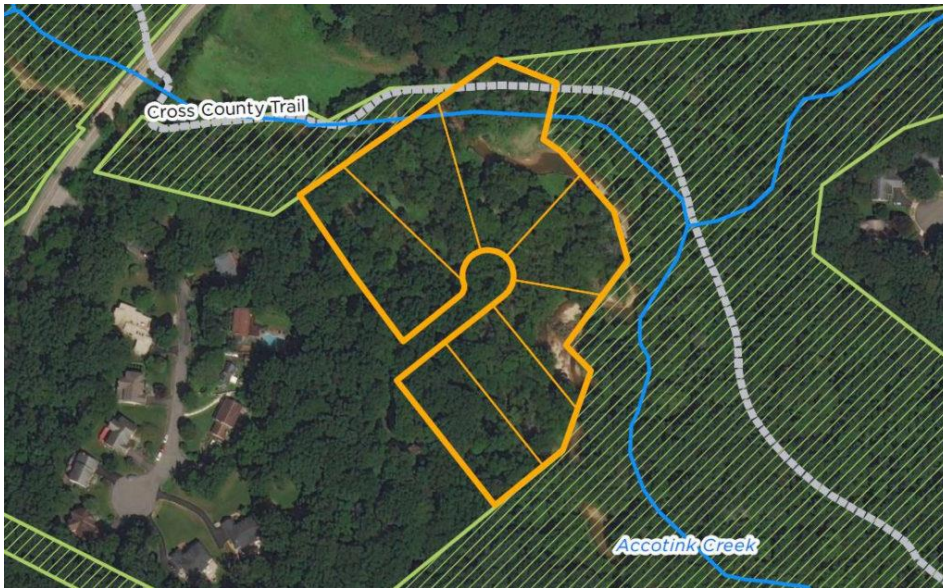
These development pressures apply to all open space, not just fragile ecological lands. In 2021, a complicated case arose at Justice High School in the Mason District. Justice High School is in desperate need of an expansion, and the county approved bond funding for the project. The proposal builds a new structure on an existing school parking lot. However, the school needs to replace the lost parking spaces. The neighboring Justice Park was proposed to transfer several acres from the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) to Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) replacing a public field with a parking lot. This proposal was made with token public outreach and after much conflict and public opposition, it was replaced with a parking waiver to be reviewed in five years. The plan ignored the value of urban open space serving the community in the zip code of highest socio-economic need<sup>8</sup>. It also highlighted the lack of investment in community parks that are frequently overridden by invasive plants and do not function effectively. Such environmental and equity issues will become more common as open space becomes scarcer and land values continue to increase.

Another example of development pressures and the inability to manage lands inappropriate for development occurred in the Accotink stream valley. Seven undeveloped properties that border the RPA and Cross County Trail were assumed by the county for back taxes. These properties are clearly unsuitable for development but could not be protected and had to be auctioned to the highest bidder. The Northern Virginia Conservation Trust tried to acquire them for transfer to the FCPA but bidding by developers was too high.

---

<sup>8</sup> Zip code 22041 surrounds Justice Park and ranks #1 in socioeconomic need in Fairfax County: <http://www.livehealthyfairfax.org/index.php?module=indicators&controller=index&action=socioneeds>





**Figure 1-1: Accotink Creek properties auctioned in 2022**

Source: Annandale today, May 24, 2022: Environmental group hopes to prevent developers from buying Annandale land  
<https://annandaletoday.com/environmental-group-hopes-to-prevent-developer-from-buying-annandale-land>

From the perspective of a net-environmental benefit, these lands in good forested condition have the highest potential environmental benefit. The county needs the tools and resources to make decisions that protect these fragile lands as well as those that provide equitable benefit to all county residents and meet the future commitments made to address global climate change.

There are also development pressures for land not necessarily considered environmentally sensitive. One example allowing development in the Dulles Airport Noise Impact Overlay District. This district allows development that was deemed inappropriate in the past due to concerns with the loud airplane landing<sup>9</sup> noise. Specifically, as noted in the Staff Report:

*“The FAA has adopted DNL 65 dBA as the threshold of significant noise exposure. ... The consideration of new residential uses within the 60-65 DNL airport noise contour area ..., could, with appropriate noise mitigation, enhance economic development opportunities, provide additional housing, and provide opportunities for residents to live and work in a mixed-use area with reasonable commutes along the Route 28, I-66, and Dulles Tollway corridors. Allowing new residential uses within*

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/planning-development/plan-amendments/airport-noise-policy>

Formatted: Normal, No bullets or numbering

*the 60-65 DNL airport noise contour area would also allow the conversion of under-performing, single-use, non-residential uses, such as office parks, into residential and mixed-use developments with a mix of amenities that could keep these areas economically viable.”*

A final development pressure example involves the consideration of zoning criteria for data centers. These generate significant revenue, but also consume large amounts of space, energy, and water. These energy intensive industrial uses should be considered thru the rubric of land use factors. In all these cases, net-environmental benefit would be a valuable tool to evaluate the efficacy of new proects.

- Formatted: Font: (Default) Arial, Font color: Auto
- Formatted: Normal, No bullets or numbering
- Formatted: Font: (Default) Arial, Font color: Auto
- Formatted: Font: (Default) Arial, Font color: Auto
- Formatted: Font: (Default) Arial, Font color: Auto
- Formatted: Font: (Default) Arial, Font color: Auto

**Climate Change, Green Buildings, & Heat Islands**

The county has made important commitments to address climate change and resiliency, many of which depend on changing the way land is developed, redeveloped, and used. Fairfax County has policies for both government and private properties. In 2021, the county approved the updated Operational Energy Strategy, which is aligned with the Sustainable Building Policy for Capital Projects, setting a path for county government buildings in design and construction beginning 2021 to be net-zero energy.<sup>10</sup> The county is on track to meet the public sector commitment of the Carbon Neutral Declaration, as shown in Figure 1-2, with future construction meeting net zero standards. Net zero means the total energy used by the building is equal to the amount of renewable energy generated on-site or through offsite procurement.

**FIGURE 1-2. County Sustainable Development Policy delivering Net Zero for all future building designs and some currently under construction.**

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/environment-energy-coordination/green-building>



1. LAND USE



• TOTAL Green County Buildings: **41** completed, **30** in progress

#	Site	LEED	Solar Ready	Net Zero	EV Ready	Post OES?	Status	#	Site	LEED	Solar Ready	Net Zero	EV Ready	Post OES?	Status
1	Police Heliport	Silver	No	No	Yes	No	5	16	Patrick Henry Shelter	Silver	Yes	No	Yes	No	3
2	Innovation Garage	n/a	Yes	No	Yes	No	5	17	Original Mt. Vernon HS	Gold	Yes	No	Yes	No	3
3	Reston Fire Station	Silver	Yes	No	No	No	5	18	Fairview Fire Station	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3
4	Sully Community Center	Gold	Yes	No	Yes	No	5	19	Judicial Complex Building One	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2
5	Woodlawn Fire Station	Platinum	Yes	No	No	No	5	20	Mason Police Station	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2
6	Lorton Community Ctr & Library	Gold	Yes	No	Yes	No	5	21	Gunston Fire Station	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2
7	Edsall Road Fire Station	Silver	Yes	No	No	No	5	22	West Annandale Fire Station	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2
8	South County PS & Animal Shelter	Silver	Yes	No	Yes	No	4	23	Tysons Fire Station #29	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2
9	Springfield CBC Commuter	n/a	Yes	No	Yes	No	4	24	Patrick Henry Library Garage	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2
10	Stormwater Wastewater Facility	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	4	25	Willard Health Center	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1
11	Operational Support Bureau	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	4	26	Audrey Moore Rec Center	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1
12	Monument Garage **820 spaces	Parksmart	Yes	No	Yes	No	4	27	Penn Daw Fire Station	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1
13	Seven Corners Fire Station	Gold	Yes	No	Yes	No	4	28	Eleanor Kennedy Shelter	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1
14	Kingstowne Library/Franconia PS	Gold	Yes	No	Yes	No	4	29	Crossroads	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1
15	Mount Vernon Rec Center	Silver	Yes	No	Yes	No	4	30	George Mason Library	Gold	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1

**Figure 1-2: New Fairfax County Facilities and Renovations being built to revised Sustainable Development**

Source: Staff Report on Climate Action Implementation

[https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/sites/boardofsupervisors/files/assets/agenda/%20item%205b\\_staff%20report%20on%20climate%20action%20implementation%20\\_a-1a.pdf](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/sites/boardofsupervisors/files/assets/agenda/%20item%205b_staff%20report%20on%20climate%20action%20implementation%20_a-1a.pdf)

The county commitment to net zero construction demonstrates the feasibility of high building standards across the public and private sector. The private sector goal is much broader and more impactful. The county cannot delay establishing specific policies and guidance that weave climate priorities and ecological protection into private sector developments and redevelopments.

EQAC is also concerned with the heat island effect caused by urban development. Research has shown that tree-covered surfaces and paved surfaces can differ by 40 degrees Fahrenheit<sup>11</sup>. New buildings should include landscaping standards to minimize the heat island effect<sup>12</sup>.

EQAC includes a recommendation to accelerate the creation of private development planning guidance and zoning regulations that will align with the Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP) and Resilient Fairfax reports.

**Resource Protection Areas (RPA) Outreach, Especially Tidal Wetlands**

RPAs are regulated shorelines of streams, rivers and other waterways associated with environmentally sensitive land that lie alongside or nearby which drain into the

<sup>11</sup> Ziter, Carly D., et al. "Scale-dependent interactions between tree canopy cover and impervious surfaces reduce daytime urban heat during summer." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116.15 (2019): 7575-7580.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/green-infrastructure/reduce-urban-heat-island-effect>

Chesapeake Bay and are a key component of resiliency<sup>13</sup>. RPAs protect water quality, filter pollutants from stormwater runoff, reduce the volume of stormwater runoff, prevent erosion, and perform other important biological and ecological functions. Development is generally not permitted even when there is sufficient buildable area. Accessory structures like sheds, gazebos, pools, etc. require approval via a public hearing and fees. Clear-cutting is not permitted. The county's Land Development Services (LDS) has engaged in outreach to RPA property owners by providing an annual mailer, dedicated webpage, and Channel 16 videos to help inform landowners of their responsibilities to protect the RPA land.

More specifically, Fairfax County also has extensive tidal wetlands, which are also in the RPA, that provide important ecosystem services, such as protection against flooding and erosion and serve as nursery and feeding grounds for waterfowl, fish, and shellfish. However, engagement with owners of tidal wetlands is not sufficient, particularly given a change in state law in 2020.

Since 1972, Commonwealth law and later County Code have called for tidal wetlands to be protected. The County Wetlands Ordinance was updated to coincide with the 2020 Commonwealth update to the law including a requirement that living shorelines be used for shoreline erosion protection wherever suitable. Living shoreline methods use natural elements to create effective buffers for absorbing wave energy and protect against shoreline erosion.

In 2022 the Fairfax County Wetlands Board developed specific county guidelines at the request of the Board of Supervisors to preserve and protect tidal wetlands. Concerns have been raised by the Mount Vernon Community Council and others about the impact of the new law, ordinance, and guidelines. Landowners of tidal wetlands would significantly benefit from additional clarity and targeted outreach on this topic.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. Update the State of the Plan and Concept for Future Development map.**  
*Recommendation: 1LU-2018.1 | Age: 5 years | Status: ~~Making progress~~Complete*
- 2. ~~Improve Policy Plan language to prioritize protection of fragile lands and enhance environmental benefits of redevelopment. Implement specific processes that minimize ecological degradation from development pressure.~~**  
*Recommendation: 1LU-2019.3 | Age: 4 years | Status: ~~Updated, Making Progress~~Making progress*
- 3. Private sector green building standards.**  
*Recommendation: 1LU-2021.1 | Age: 3 years | Status: Making progress*
- 4. Tidal wetlands outreach.**  
*Recommendation: 1LU-2023.1 | Age: New | Status: ~~Stalled~~New this year*

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/landdevelopment/chesapeake-bay-preservation-ordinance>

## **COMMENTS AND/OR CONCERNS**

The following section summarizes some additional material covered in this chapter. While not rising to the level of recommendations, they nonetheless are deserving of thought as we move forward.

### **1. Affordable Housing**

EQAC commends the continued focus on affordable housing in the Communitywide Housing Strategic Plan and the Strategic Plan to Facilitate the Economic Success of Fairfax County. There are many development efforts under way that allow people to live and work nearby, reducing commuting pollution and development sprawl and decreasing pressure on natural areas.

### **2. Holistic Comprehensive Planning Process**

EQAC is an advocate for holistic planning processes and supports the Site-Specific Plan Amendment (SSPA) Process. Holistic approaches align with the vision to consider economic, social, and environmental factors resulting in vibrant, healthy, and desirable places. Prior reports elevated this topic to a recommendation. EQAC will continue tracking the process to ensure that SSPA continues to:

- a. Prioritize large study areas that encompass multiple projects.
- b. Include a robust screening process to ensure that the most appropriate projects are considered at a site-specific level.
- c. Develop Policy Plan amendments that improve environmental outcomes across all projects.

### **~~3. Advance Land Development Applications and Information~~**

~~EQAC commends the county for completing phase 4 of the PLUS system to create a single system of record for land development. This provides a centralized platform for analyzing the Comprehensive Plan development potential both during review and when amendments are approved.~~

Formatted: Indent: Left: -0.25"

### **4.3. County Green Buildings Standards**



EQAC commends the county for adopting strong green building standards for public facilities that target net-zero over time and create aspirational examples for the private sector. EQAC urges the county to consistently hold private sector development to the highest building standards, both current standards and future ones that address climate change and adapt a policy of net-benefit to the environment when considering exceptions.



**SCORECARD ELEMENTS**

Here is a set of status symbol for you to paste into the third column (Right click and select “View Alt Text” for icon definitions):




	Land Use <i>Four Recommendations in 2023</i>	Status / EQAC Comments
1	<p><i>Recommendation: 1LU-2018.1</i></p> <p><b>Update the State of the Plan and Concept for Future Development Map</b> EQAC recommends that the Board authorize an update to the State of the Plan document. The last State of the Plan covered 2000 to 2010. Since then, the county has seen significant growth and changes in process and technology. A review of the plan and the effects of the processes is timely.</p> <p>EQAC also recommends that the Board authorize the development of a Concept for Future Transportation, Development, and Green Infrastructure. The 1992 Concept for Future Development map has largely been realized and a future map that looks out 20 to 50 years is needed.</p> <p><b>Summary of Action Taken by Agency or Department</b> This recommendation is <del>being addressed. Work on the State of the Plan document is ongoing. The document was set to be published in 2022, but is delayed to include analysis of 2020-2022 and should be done in early 2024</del>complete.</p> <p>The county is moving towards greater use of interactive mapping applications, rather than static maps, including the JADE mapping tool that allows users to display multiple layers of data and dynamically turn on and off information and data.</p>	<p><del>Making Progress</del>Complete / Recommended since 2019</p> <p></p> <p><del>The 2023 State of the Plan completes this recommendation. Recent discussions have noted the publication is being delayed to include analysis of 2020-2022 and is on track for 2024 completion.</del></p> <p>The Concept for Future Transportation, Development, and Green Infrastructure will provide a long-term vision for large investment projects and holistic rejuvenation of the County environmental infrastructure.</p>
2	<p><i>Recommendation: 1LU-2019.3</i></p> <p><b>Improve Policy Plan language to prioritize protection of fragile lands and enhance environmental benefits of redevelopment. Processes to Minimize Ecological Degradation from Development Pressure</b></p>	<p><del>Making Progress</del>Updated / Recommended since 2020</p> <p></p>

<b>Land Use</b> <i>Four Recommendations in 2023<del>4</del></i>	<b>Status / EQAC Comments</b>
<p>As the county addresses build-out, it is important to prioritize environmental protection of increasingly valuable open space. EQAC <del>has proposed a</del> <u>extending the concept <b>net environmental benefit</b> that is used to protect the RPA from unacceptable development be extended to that all recommends that the County adopt a policy that all development provides a <b>net environmental benefit to in</b> the County. <del>In effect open space or infill development where fragile lands that are unsuitable for development are under development pressure would have to show significant environmental benefit rather than meet minimum standards. This applies equally to redevelopment where new standards mandate improved environmental functioning.</del></u></p> <p><u>EQAC recommends directing Staff to develop sample comprehensive plan and zoning language that demonstrates how this concept could be implemented beyond the RPA.</u></p> <p><del>EQAC also recommends that the ecological function of existing land be a consideration when new development is proposed on open space. This establishes the value of land that can be applied consistently across all projects and fits into the multi-dimensional rubric that needs to be considered for future planning.</del></p> <p><del>This recommendation applies to development in mixed-use centers with dense growth potential, as well as infill development where fragile lands that are unsuitable for development are under development pressure.</del></p> <p><b>Summary of Action Taken by Agency or Department</b>                      This recommendation is discussed through Comprehensive Plan policies, which address the identification, preservation, protection, and enhancement of plant and animal life and the creation of an integrated network of ecologically valuable land and surface waters. The county seeks to balance the protection and enhancement of these resources while planning for the orderly development and redevelopment of the county.</p> <p>These efforts have focused primarily on Environmental Quality Corridors (EQCs), Resource Protection Areas (RPAs), floodplains, and steep slopes and tree preservation and tree cover. These areas contain valuable ecological resources and help create an ecological network. Resources</p>	<p>With the intense development pressure on natural space, this recommendation is increasingly important.</p> <p>On December 6, 2022, the Board of Supervisors authorized consideration of a Comprehensive Plan amendment to update the Countywide Policy Plan.</p> <p>The environmental plan is the section to include these recommendations. The update needs to establish appropriate expectations for improved natural resource protection.</p> <p>There are many examples of inappropriate development, low environmental priority on land use decisions, and missed preservation opportunities of scarce natural lands.</p> <p>Examples: Auctioned Land along Accotink Creek near RPA and adjacent to the Cross County Trail, Road expansion along Route 7 in Great Falls.</p>

Formatted: Font: Bold



	<b>Land Use</b> <i>Four Recommendations in 2023</i>	<b>Status / EQAC Comments</b>
	within these areas are considered on a site-by-site basis as land use applications are reviewed by staff and evaluated by the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.	
3	<p><i>Recommendation: 1LU-2021.4</i></p> <p><b>Private Sector Green Building Standards</b>                      EQAC commends the county for adopting strong green building standards for public facilities. With the recently accepted CECAP goal of net-zero energy by 2050, it is necessary to begin adopting Comprehensive Plan language and zoning regulations to encourage private sector land use to achieve the net-zero goals.</p> <p><b>Summary of Action Taken by Agency or Department</b>                      This recommendation is in the process of being addressed. Actions are currently underway to review existing policies and identify areas for CECAP implementation. As part of a <u>future</u> Plan or Zoning Ordinance Amendment, research and study will be required to determine anticipated growth, estimated energy consumption, and what measures should be recommended to attain net-zero energy. All actions necessary to address EQAC’s recommendation would be conducted during a future Plan or Zoning Ordinance Amendment.</p>	<p>Making Progress / Recommended since 2021</p>  <p>EQAC continues to encourage rapid adoption of policies to achieve the CECAP goals. The County has adopted exemplary public sector green building standards. Private sector standards need to follow.</p>
4	<p><i>Recommendation: 1LU-2023.1</i></p> <p><b>Tidal Wetlands Outreach</b>                      Conduct outreach to RPA and Tidal Wetlands Property Owners to convey the responsibility to protect these resources and obtain permits for modifications where required.</p>	