

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

MAJOR CONCEPTS OF THE PLUS PROGRAM

Environmental preservation and improvement have been a consistent theme in recent County planning. Environmental quality corridors, a concept first adopted through PLUS planning, bring together the integrated nature of the complex natural resources of the County. Analysis of these resources is an important first step toward improving environmental conservation and development of expanded open space. The environmental quality corridors (EQCs) reflect many types of land resources, including stream valleys, wildlife habitats, wetlands, recreational open space, visual resources, and other land features which should be related in a coherent fashion.

Major issues remain unresolved concerning implementation of EQCs. These issues range from the need to strengthen present acquisition and preservation tools to the institutional umbrellas necessary to satisfy the objectives outlined by EQCs. The future of Fairfax County's environment will rest significantly upon the ability of the County to implement successfully programs which protect the land identified under the EQCs.

The PLUS program has also devoted energies to other environmental issues. Air quality is one of the most significant concerns of the coming decade. Present and pending federal legislation and standards may constitute one of the most important developments in land use controls of this century. The County is working on many fronts to fully implement its potential role in air quality planning. The acquisition of improved monitoring and evaluation capabilities and the implementation of air quality modeling will be important to future County development.

Other significant environmental advances are also being achieved. The County, with leadership of the Stream Valley Board, has initiated a significant study of stream valley characteristics in Fairfax County. This effort will result in significant new data for the County to assist in many aspects of planning and development management. As this information becomes available, it will be integrated into the ongoing functions of the County.

The proposed planned development centers are also an important concept supporting the PLUS plans. To preserve environmental amenities, urban activities must be structured in clustered and meaningful patterns. All planning analysis points to the necessity of resource conservation and protection. Some of the most wasteful resource practices in urban America today result from ineffective land use patterns which lack coherent or meaningful purpose.

The County has conducted significant new research which points to the necessity of planned development centers as the basic pattern for future County development. The transportation analysis included in the Plan identifies serious constraints associated with the present transportation patterns. The dominance of work trips to the central city creates a transportation demand which Fairfax County may never be able to meet fully. In fact, the data suggest that County policies should respond through emphasis on employment in planned development centers in the western part of the County as a means of ameliorating the present radial transportation patterns. These centers should encourage reverse commuting patterns and intercept trips which would otherwise impact the eastern sections of the County. Simply planning the western portions of the County in extremely low densities will not solve the problem, as data indicate. The surrounding counties will contribute to peak-hour transportation impacts by channeling large numbers of automobiles onto the already crowded roads in Fairfax County.

Therefore, development of employment opportunities in the western sections of the County must be a major development objective of the County government.

Federal employment locations and work patterns are also significant. The County must exercise more effective influence toward decentralization of federal offices into the County. Fairfax County should not be expected to bear the burden of federal location policies, without a voice toward gaining better distribution of employment centers in the County and the region. Potential changes in work patterns, such as the four-day work week and flexible hours, may eventually have significant impacts on transportation requirements.

The transportation component of the Comprehensive Plan raise other major policy questions. One of the most significant concerns the County's willingness to invest its financial resources in road improvements. A first necessary step must be the establishment of a County transportation plan and program which makes effective use of current funds available through the Virginia Department of Highways and Transportation. Without adopted plans and programs, the current funds available cannot be utilized effectively to carry out County policies.

As the plans and programs in the document are considered, the County should deliberate whether County resources should be invested in new roadway development. Many of the plan objectives are contingent upon transportation responses. Under the past level of funding from the state government for new road construction, not all of the 15-year plan can be implemented during this period. Additional resources must be directed to County transportation, either through County resources or from the state government.

A major theme of the PLUS program has been the project impact evaluation system (PIES). Plans can only serve as general guidelines for decision-making. Although they are important, it is equally critical that evaluation methodologies be available to measure precise impacts of proposed projects. The County is carrying on systematic efforts to improve evaluation methodologies. As these are formulated, they will be applied to the appropriate planning and development processes. In the past, County plan analysis became dated and obsolete within a relatively short period of time. The County has, over the past several years, engaged in systematic improvement of evaluation skills which should improve needed information. Analysis is taking place in two primary areas, environmental constraints and fiscal impact. For example, the formulation of the air quality monitoring and evaluations skills will give the County a major new tool for analysis of development patterns. Fairfax County must constantly advance its analytical capabilities to meet the development problems found in this rapidly urbanizing jurisdiction.

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS AND THE PLANNING PROCESS

One of the major themes of the PLUS program is the formulation of plans and implementation tools to time growth and development in an effective manner. The plans outline the desired future for Fairfax County. The implementation tools must provide the means to meet effectively the stated development objectives. The County has devoted considerable energy to the analysis of ways to ensure that adequate public facilities are provided its citizens. The possible use of an adequate public facilities ordinance was given careful attention during the past two years. One conclusion reached in these deliberations was that specific plans for future development and im-

plementation of capital improvements programs are critical first steps prior to the establishment of public facilities constraints over new development. Therefore, substantial effort has been directed toward the implementation tools and planning processes necessary to provide the County with more effective control over the timing of growth and development.

The Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is an essential tool in plan implementation. During the first year of the PLUS program, the County published its first Capital Improvement Program. This CIP was primarily a compilation of existing project plans. Completion of the PLUS plans was required before a new CIP could reflect future needs and demands in a coherent, purposeful manner. The second CIP is being published in conjunction with the Comprehensive Plan. It will outline the public facilities necessary to support growth and development outlined in these plans for a five-year period. Fairfax County, for the first time in its history, will have both updated plans and the public facilities programs necessary for their implementation.

The annual review of the CIP associated with annual assessment of the Plan will provide decision makers and citizens an opportunity to guide and direct the growth and development of the County in a manner consistent with long range objectives and current needs. The CIP and annual Plan assessment will be subject to citizen review and comment prior to adoption by the Board of Supervisors. The County staff will monitor development trends and demographic changes, and prepare an annual assessment which may indicate ongoing adjustments in the Comprehensive Plan. Through this process, the County will significantly improve its ability to determine short range development patterns in a manner consistent with long term objectives.

Zoning is a basic implementation tool which has received considerable County attention during the past several years. The *Zoning Ordinance*, which is adopted in principle for implementation in the coming year, stands as a major advance toward simplification and improvement of zoning procedures and requirements. In the short run, the County has a substantial zoning docket which will have a tremendous impact on the future development of the County. Because the countywide and area plans are being completed on schedule, the County will make these zoning decisions on the basis of updated comprehensive plans. In the future, cyclical zoning processes should provide the County citizens and applicants an opportunity to have zoning cases heard in conjunction with appropriate area plans. In the past, zonings were considered largely on a fragmented and individual basis. In the future, the four area plans should provide an opportunity to consider cumulative impacts of zonings in conjunction with updated plans.

The future of Fairfax County planning rests significantly on future developments in federal and state law. Air quality planning will be impacted heavily by trends in federal legislation. As the federal government continues its development of standards and program initiatives concerning local land use, Fairfax County must maintain an active role in monitoring and influencing federal decisions. The County's location adjacent to the Nation's Capital facilitates its ability to carry on this type of activity.

State legislation is also of immediate concern. State laws govern County planning organization and activities as the PLUS plans are adopted and implementation tools come into use, state legislation should be sought to strengthen our planning tools.