

## **PREFACE AND INTRODUCTION**

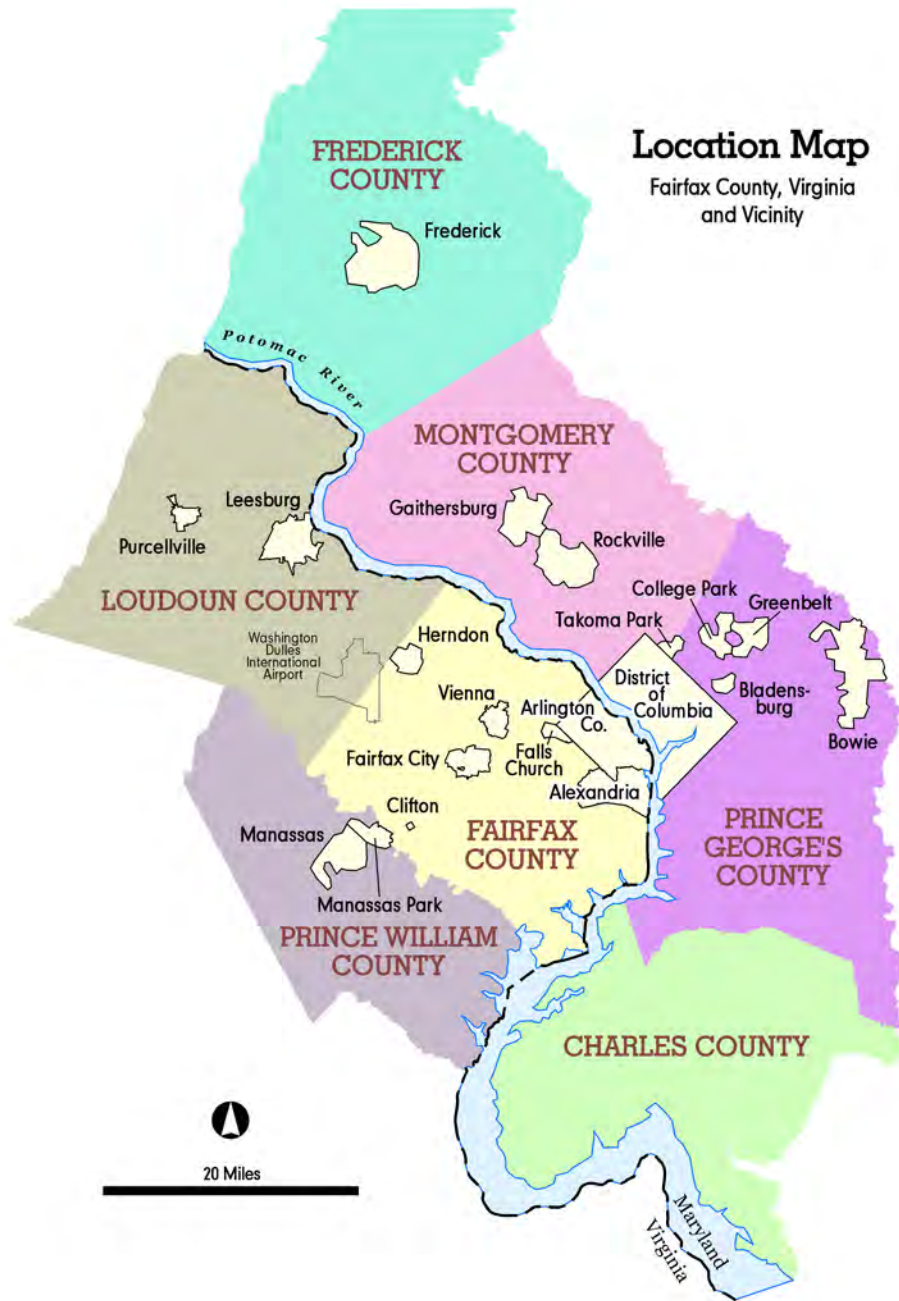
Fairfax County is one of the most dynamic jurisdictions in the Washington metropolitan region (see Figure 1). It is an integral part of a region that encompasses hundreds of square miles and almost five million people, according to the 2010 Census. See Figure 1 for the location map of Fairfax County, Virginia and the surrounding region. In its early history, Fairfax County was a food producer for the nation's capital. After World War II, the county became a suburban bedroom community on the fringe of Washington, D.C. Today the county is a multifaceted employment center, a generator of retail sales that are among the highest in the country, and an assemblage of residential communities that are home to a rapidly growing and increasingly varied population. Concentrations of employment and retail uses, such as Tysons Corner, the Dulles Corridor, Fairfax Center and Springfield, play regional and local roles that only a generation ago were reserved for the downtowns of central cities. The county's role as an agricultural producer has virtually disappeared, and preservation of remaining farmland, conservation of areas of high environmental and scenic value, and protection of open space have become high priorities.

Until the mid-1960s, major roads led in a radial pattern to Washington, D.C., through the more urbanized areas of Northern Virginia (Falls Church, Arlington, and Alexandria). Radial highways such as Interstate 95 (I-95), Interstate 66 (I-66), the Dulles Airport Access and Dulles Toll Road (DAAR, Route 267), and the Lee-Jackson Memorial Highway (Route 50) are now supplemented by the Metrorail transit system and the Virginia Railway Express (VRE) regional/commuter rail service to link the various parts of the county and also link the county with Washington, D.C., Maryland, and the rest of Northern Virginia. The Capital Beltway/ Interstate 495 (I-495) also links the inner, regional suburbs, while the Fairfax County Parkway (Route 286) links the southern and western portions of the county.

Fairfax County contains almost 400 square miles and is home to over one million people, making it the most populous jurisdiction in the Washington metropolitan region as of the 2010 Census. Due to rapid growth over the past several decades, the county is confronted with a dwindling supply of vacant land, and attention has turned to revitalization and redevelopment in the county's mixed use centers. Both residential and nonresidential development are the focus of these areas, in order to support a sustainable pattern of land use that protects stable single-family neighborhoods and preserves natural and cultural resources.

Growth has brought many benefits to Fairfax County and the region. County residents enjoy a fine quality of life. However, growth has also brought challenges in terms of land use, housing, and transportation. These challenges have implications for the provision of public facilities, parks, recreation facilities, and the conservation of the environment and heritage resources. The broad implications of growth serve as background for countywide policy put forth in this Comprehensive Plan. Successfully addressing the challenges associated with growth is necessary to maintain the quality of life for present and future generations. The Policy Plan provides guidance about addressing these challenges.

The Policy Plan is the first volume of the Comprehensive Plan, in addition to the four Area Plans, the Comprehensive Land Use Plan map, and the Countywide Transportation Plan Map and Countywide Trails Plan Map. The Policy Plan contains goals, objectives, and policies relating to eleven functional elements: Land Use, Transportation, Housing, Environment, Economic Development, Heritage Resources, Public Facilities, Human Services, Parks and Recreation, Revitalization, and Visual and Performing Arts. The goals, objectives, and policies guide planning and development review by describing future development patterns in Fairfax County and protecting natural and cultural resources.



LOCATION MAP

FIGURE 1

The Policy Plan includes the following sections:

The Goals for Fairfax County are used as the basis for forming countywide planning policy. This section describes the process through which the goals were adopted. It also enumerates and describes the goals, which range from Land Use and Transportation to Environmental Protection and Affordable Housing.

The Countywide Planning Objectives and Policies section addresses countywide policy by specific functional area. This section expands upon the goals, through objectives and policies, to help guide decisions that affect the built and natural environment for the county as a whole and for specific parcels of land.

The Glossary contains an alphabetical listing of terms and their definitions as they are used in the context of this document. These are not intended to be the same definitions as used in the county's Zoning Ordinance. Rather, they are intended only to explain terms used in the Plan.

#### Purpose, Scope and Legal Authority

The purpose of the Policy Plan is to provide a concise statement of objectives, policies, and guidelines for implementing the county's goals about the future development pattern of the built environment and the preservation of the natural and cultural resources in Fairfax County. The Plan serves as a general guide for the Board of Supervisors, the Planning Commission, the Board of Zoning Appeals, county staff, and the citizens of Fairfax County with respect to development and redevelopment in the county. The timeframe for the Plan encompasses the anticipated changes to the county over at least twenty years. As required by Virginia Code, the county will review the Plan for the future at least once every five years.

The Policy Plan is based on goals adopted by the Board of Supervisors on October 28, 1988. The goals, objectives, policies, and guidelines are defined as follows:

- Goals provide general direction regarding the aspirations of the community;
- Objectives are statements that provide further direction for achieving an aspect of a goal;
- Policies are approaches for pursuing a given objective, providing guidance which, when pursued, will assist in implementing the objective;
- Guidelines provide more explicit guidance for achieving policies and the Policy

The legal basis for this Plan is well established in the law of the Commonwealth. The Code of Virginia in Section 15.2-2223 states that "the local commission shall prepare and recommend a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction." The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to achieve "a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the territory which will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants.

According to the Code, the Comprehensive Plan is "general in nature" and may include, but is not limited to, the designation of land use, transportation systems, public services and facilities, historic areas, etc. The Comprehensive Plan "shall show the commission's long range recommendations for the general development of the territory covered by the plan. . ." The law

also identifies methods of implementation such as a zoning ordinance or zoning district map, a subdivision ordinance and a capital improvements plan.

The local commission is required to review the Comprehensive Plan at least once every five years to determine whether the Plan should be amended.

## GOALS FOR FAIRFAX COUNTY

On August 6, 1973, the Board of Supervisors approved sixteen interim policies designed to serve as the basic framework for developing the long-range comprehensive plan process. Following an initial series of public forums from November 1973 through January 1974 and after extensive review, the validity of these policies was reaffirmed in October 1974. They were included in the Comprehensive Plan adopted September 8, 1975, as a result of the Planning Land Use System (PLUS) process. This was the first countywide land use plan since 1958.

The policies continued to guide decision making until February 1987, when the Board of Supervisors appointed the Fairfax County Goals Advisory Commission (Goals Commission) to review the policies in terms of the county's evolution over twelve years. First, the Goals Commission decided to use the term "goal" instead of "policy" to describe these statements of aspirations for the county. The Goals Commission assessed the accomplishments and shortcomings of the county in terms of achieving the goals, defined current problems, and recommended courses of action. The Goals Commission recommended eighteen new goals to guide Fairfax County into the future.

The recommendations of the Goals Commission were reviewed by the community in 1988 through an extensive public participation process, including district task forces, individual citizens, county staff, the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. After public hearings before the Planning Commission and the Board, the Goals for Fairfax County were adopted on October 24, 1988.

The goals are comprehensive, encompassing every aspect of Fairfax County government, not limited to merely the planning function. Implementing some aspects of the goals is beyond the legislative mandate of the Planning Commission and the purview of the Comprehensive Plan. However, because the planning function is so far-reaching, it is critical to use the goals as the basis for forming countywide planning policy. Therefore, the Goals for Fairfax County have provided the strategic focus for the objectives and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

**Quality of Life** - The primary goal of Fairfax County's policies and priorities is to achieve an outstanding quality of life through:

- Economic prosperity and expanding opportunity;
- Access to high quality education, public services and facilities;
- A balance between access to convenient multi-modal transportation and residential, commercial and industrial growth; and
- A pleasing physical and cultural environment in which to live and work.

**Land Use** - The county's land use policies should maintain an attractive and pleasant quality of life for its residents; provide for orderly and coordinated development for both public and private uses while sustaining the economic and social well-being of the county; provide for an adequate level of public services and facilities, including a system of transportation facilities, to sustain a high quality of life; and ensure sound environmental practices in the development and redevelopment of land resources. Growth should take place in accordance with criteria and standards designed to preserve, enhance, and protect an orderly and aesthetic mix of residential, commercial/industrial facilities, and open space without compromising existing residential development. The

Comprehensive Land Use Plan should set forth long-range recommendations and implementation techniques to ensure the envisioned coordination of harmonious development, while still achieving our economic goals. Densities and heights in excess of those compatible with these goals should be discouraged. These policies should not be construed as incompatible with the county's affordable housing goal.

**Transportation** - Land use must be balanced with the supporting transportation infrastructure, including the regional network, and credibility must be established within the public and private sectors that the transportation program will be implemented. Fairfax County will encourage the development of accessible transportation systems designed, through advanced planning and technology, to move people and goods efficiently while minimizing environmental impact and community disruption. Regional and local efforts to achieve a balanced transportation system through the development of rapid rail, commuter rail, expanded bus service and the reduction of excessive reliance upon the automobile should be the keystone policy for future planning and facilities. Sidewalks and trails should be developed as alternate transportation facilities leading to mass transit, high density areas, public facilities and employment areas.

**Environmental Protection** - The amount and distribution of population density and land uses in Fairfax County should be consistent with environmental constraints inherent in the need to preserve natural resources and to meet or exceed federal, state and local standards for water quality, ambient air quality and other environmental standards. Development in Fairfax County should be sensitive to the natural setting, in order to prevent degradation of the county's natural environment.

**Energy Conservation** - Fairfax County should promote energy efficiency and energy conservation within the public, commercial, residential, and industrial sectors.

**Growth and Adequate Public Facilities** - Growth in Fairfax County should be held to a level consistent with available, accessible, and adequate public facilities as well as with rational plans to provide new public facilities and to maintain existing public facilities. The county's plans for development should take into account financial limitations associated with increased needs for public facilities.

**Adequate Public Services** - Fairfax County is committed to provide a high level and quality of public services to the community, within its financial limitations.

**Affordable Housing** - Opportunities should be available to all who live or work in Fairfax County to purchase or rent safe, decent, affordable housing within their means. Affordable housing should be located as close as possible to employment opportunities without adversely affecting quality of life standards. It should be a vital element in high density and mixed-use development projects, should be encouraged in revitalization areas, and encouraged through more flexible zoning wherever possible.

**Economic Development and Opportunities** – Fairfax maintain its prosperous economic climate and varied employment opportunities by continuing to develop and pursue a broad range of actions, including public/private partnerships, designed to enhance its long-term competitive position in regional, national, and international economic development. At the same time, the county should enhance those systems that support the employability of the population for its economic betterment.

**Education** - Fairfax County should provide comprehensive education, training programs, and facilities in order to ensure quality education by effectively meeting student and community needs.

**Human Services** - Fairfax County should provide a range of services and facilities for all residents, so that they may sustain a secure and productive lifestyle. Each individual should have the opportunity to achieve self-sufficiency and function to the limits of his or her ability, particularly in providing family stability.

**Culture and Recreation** - Fairfax County should provide local systems and participate in regional programs for safe, accessible and enjoyable parks (including active, passive, and historical parks); recreational programs; libraries; and cultural programs and facilities. Fairfax County should also support and encourage the identification and preservation of its heritage resources for the aesthetic, social, and educational benefits of present and future citizens.

**Open Space** - Fairfax County should support the conservation of appropriate land areas in a natural state to preserve, protect and enhance stream valleys, meadows, woodlands, wetlands, farmland, and plant and animal life. Small areas of open space should also be preserved in already congested and developed areas for passive neighborhood uses, visual relief, scenic value, and screening and buffering purposes.

**Revitalization** - Fairfax County should encourage and facilitate the revitalization of older commercial and residential areas of the county where present conditions warrant. Revitalization initiatives should encourage business development, promote public and private investment and reinvestment, and seek to prevent or eliminate the negative effects of deteriorating commercial and industrial areas. Revitalization efforts should work in concert with other community programs and infrastructure improvements and strive to foster a sense of place unique to each area, thereby contributing to the social and economic well-being of the community and the county.

**Regional Cooperation** - Fairfax County's elected officials and staff should continue to participate in leadership roles in cooperative regional activities, recognizing that the physical, economic, and social well-being of the people of Northern Virginia and the Washington metropolitan area are dependent upon regional cooperation.

**Private Sector Facilities** - Fairfax County should continue to encourage the development of appropriately scaled and clustered commercial and industrial facilities to meet the need for convenient access to needed goods and services and to employment opportunities. Particular attention should be given to the needs of small and minority businesses.

**Public Participation** - The Fairfax County community should be encouraged to take part in the shaping of policies and plans that will affect the environment in which they live and work. Active and timely public participation in actions involving areas of public concern in the county should be encouraged and promoted.

**Financial Planning and Management** - Fairfax County should support equitable systems of taxation and user charges, where appropriate, necessary to implement all its policies and to support quality public services for its residents, recognizing the county's obligations to provide services and facilities to both established and new development, and to attract quality residential projects and desirable business and industry.

**Monitoring** - The county's performance in achieving these goals should be regularly and rigorously monitored, and the goals themselves should be reviewed at least once every four years.

**Visual And Performing Arts** – Fairfax County should encourage a dynamic and diverse arts presence by supporting the works, participants, and audiences in the areas of dance, creative writing, choral and instrumental music, theater arts, film and new media, two and three-dimensional visual art in traditional and contemporary cultural iterations, but also in the ways that these areas may overlap and interact with new and emerging technologies.



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## **HISTORY OF COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING IN FAIRFAX COUNTY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The history of planning in Fairfax County goes back to the mid-1950s with the adoption of the first zoning ordinance and comprehensive plan. The decade of the 1970s was marked by increasing concern among citizens and public officials regarding the problems associated with rapid and generally uncontrolled growth. In February 1973, the county created the Planning Land Use System (PLUS), a major planning effort that resulted in the 1975 Comprehensive Plan. Thirteen years later, in 1988, the county undertook a major review of the 1975 Plan, during the Planning Horizons process. This process resulted in the adoption of the Policy Plan in 1990 and the adoption of the four Area Plans in July 1991. Many of the key components of the 1975 Plan remain in the current Comprehensive Plan, such as the emphasis on focusing growth in centers; decreasing automobile dependency; and protecting environmentally sensitive areas and stable neighborhoods. What has changed are some of the means to achieve these ends. The following discussion highlights the evolution of the Plan from the 1970s to the present.

### **PLUS PROGRAM (1973-1988)**

#### PLUS Components

In the fall of 1973, efforts began toward simultaneous preparation of updated countywide and area plans, components of the Comprehensive Plan. After analyses of existing conditions and countywide issues was completed, the Countywide Plan Alternatives document was published in September 1974. This reaffirmed the "interim development and redevelopment policies," later to be known as the "Board of Supervisors Policies" in the 1975 adopted Plan. These evolved into the "Goals for Fairfax County," adopted in October 1988.

The Plan updating process was structured by grouping the 14 planning districts into four planning areas. Ultimately the Comprehensive Plan for Fairfax County, Virginia was adopted in five parts. These were Area I (adopted June 16, 1975); Area II (adopted August 25, 1975); Area III (adopted June 30, 1975); Area IV (adopted July 28, 1975); and Countywide (adopted September 8, 1975).

#### PLUS Principles

The Countywide Plan Alternatives document defined a specific approach to land use planning, the most important of which was the use of "planned development centers" as the focal point for future growth. Recommended as an alternative to sprawl, this development concept was designed to achieve the following:

- To increase local employment (in a period when Fairfax County was still primarily a bedroom suburb on the fringe of the urban core);
- To decrease reliance on the private automobile by reducing the length of work trips and making mass transit facilities more easily accessible;
- To reduce pressure for development in environmentally sensitive areas;
- To preserve stable neighborhoods; and

- To lower costs by more efficient provision of public services.

### **FAIRFAX PLANNING HORIZONS (1988-2013)**

Following its adoption in 1975, the Plan underwent some revision through the Annual Plan Review process and several small-area studies. However by the late 1980s, the Board of Supervisors decided that it was time to reassess the county's direction, and they appointed the Goals Advisory Commission in February 1987 to review the county's goals and progress. In addition, the Board restructured the Annual Plan Review Process to create the 1988 Policy Review Year. This decision was based on a Planning Commission recommendation that a Policy Review Year would provide a needed opportunity to closely examine the countywide policy volume that was guiding decision-making about site-specific issues. The Planning Commission asked the Office of Comprehensive Planning, known today as the Department of Planning and Zoning, to conduct the Plan review and to coordinate the effort with other county agencies. The effort was divided into Phase I, the review of the countywide policy volume, and Phase II, review of the other four volumes containing the Area Plans.

The process included examination of alternative concepts for future growth in population and employment. Six different land use concepts and three road networks were developed and tested for their potential impacts on the transportation system, the environment, water quality, sanitary sewer capacity, and fiscal implications.

The process of community participation for Planning Horizons was open to anyone wishing to participate. An extensive series of night meetings and Saturday workshops took place, as well as public meetings before the Planning Commission, a Planning Commission round table seminar, and formal public hearings. This process had widespread publicity, in order to keep the community informed. Eighteen working papers were distributed widely for community review.

The major product of Phase I of the Planning Horizons process was the Policy Plan. Adopted by the Board of Supervisors on August 6, 1990, the Policy Plan contains a hierarchy of goals, objectives and policies for each functional area, such as land use, transportation, the environment and public facilities. These recommendations guide planning and development review considerations to implement county goals. The goals address the future development pattern of Fairfax County and the protection of natural and cultural resources for present and future generations. Another, separate document was the Concept for Future Development, containing both text and maps, which highlighted a generalized land use pattern to guide future development for the county. Particularly distinctive was the new Land Classification System, an element of the Concept for Future Development which identified those areas that were expected to share similar characteristics by the year 2010. The Concept and the Land Classification System were accepted by the Board of Supervisors on August 6, 1990, to be used as a guide for the update of the Area Plans during Phase II of the Planning Horizons process. The Concept for Future Development was revised in 2012 to update the character descriptions and the map.

The Concept for Future Development comprises two elements: the Concept Map which shows the general location and character of future land uses and the Land Classification System which divides the county into eight broad categories that describe the desired future character for each area.

The Concept Map shows the general character of the county with respect to the location of each area type, metro stations and major roads. The Land Classification System, when graphically illustrated by the Concept Map, presents a future policy direction for Fairfax County.

The Concept for Future Development's policy direction is that almost all employment growth should occur within designated Mixed-Use Centers and Industrial Areas. When combined, these centers and Industrial Areas encompass about 10% of the county's land area. With the exception of the Industrial Areas, some degree of mixed-use development is encouraged for activity centers. This emphasis on mixed-use development is designed to introduce a residential component into employment areas. Mixed-use development is generally defined as two or more uses designed to be functionally, economically and aesthetically integrated. The boundaries shown for these nonresidential/mixed use areas coincide with the current boundaries of commercial, industrial, and mixed-use areas as generally defined by existing nonresidential zoning and/or the nonresidential/mixed-use boundaries traditionally identified in the Area Plans.

Within some of these employment and mixed-use oriented centers and areas, limited areas have been planned as "core" or "transit development" areas. Medium to high density development intensities within these core and transit development areas are planned to take advantage of transportation and other functional opportunities and are often centered around a transit station or planned town center. Lower intensities are encouraged outside the "core" and "transit development" areas in the remaining portions of these employment and mixed-use centers. Transitions are planned between core and non-core areas. These transitions are created through the tapering down of development intensity and building heights, changes in use, and through landscaping, screening and buffering treatments.

The remainder of the county is composed of Suburban Neighborhoods and Low Density Residential Areas. In general, nonresidential development is not encouraged within the Low Density Residential Areas; when appropriate, neighborhood-serving commercial services and institutional uses are encouraged within the Suburban Neighborhoods if compatibly scaled with surrounding neighborhoods.

In summary, the Concept for Future Development is a vision and direction for guiding Fairfax County's future growth and development. The Concept for Future Development generally describes the types of land uses that are appropriate throughout the county and the character envisioned for them. It is used in conjunction with the countywide objectives and policies contained in the adopted Policy Plan and provides a foundation and framework for the Area Planning process.

Phase II of Planning Horizons included the adoption of the four Area Plans by the Board of Supervisors in 1991. These volumes of the Comprehensive Plan contain detailed recommendations for land use, transportation, housing, the environment, heritage resources, public facilities and parks and recreation. These recommendations refine the guidance provided in the Policy Plan and were developed within the framework of the Concept for Future Development.

Each Area Plan is subdivided into Planning Districts, which, in turn, are subdivided into Community Planning Sectors, the smallest geographical components of the Plan. The Community Planning Sector text provides details on existing development and planned land use. For purposes of development review and other land-use related decisions it is emphasized that the planning guidance for each Planning District is contained in the Area Plan text; on the Comprehensive Land Use Plan Map; in the Policy Plan; and in the land use guidelines contained in the Concept for Future Development and Land Classification System.

The primary planning objectives in all Area Plans are to:

- Realize the objectives and policies of the Policy Plan in planning and development decisions;

- Utilize the Concept for Future Development as a guide to land use planning decisions when Plan amendments are considered; and
- Employ site-specific guidance to review and formulate recommendations for development requests in furtherance of the public health, safety and welfare as provided in the Code of Virginia.

#### The Policy Plan Action Agenda and Planning Commission ‘Super-Priorities’

The December 1989 draft version of the Policy Plan contained an ‘Action Agenda’ with over 350 items thought worthy of consideration. Given the large number of suggested actions contained in the Action Agenda, the Board of Supervisors requested that the Planning Commission consider and prioritize the Action Agenda. The Planning Commission working through its Major Plan Review Committee formed four subcommittees to examine the areas of 1) Land Use; 2) Transportation; 3) Public Facilities, Housing, Human Services and Fiscal; and 4) Environment, Parks, and Heritage Resources. County agencies provided support to the work of these committees. Six major countywide organizations concerned with the Comprehensive Plan were invited to attend and participate in the deliberations. A public workshop was held and public comments were solicited as part of the deliberations. In March of 1992, the Planning Commission presented to the Board of Supervisors a list of ten ‘super-priorities’ that included about 45 of the ‘agenda’ items. The commission felt the identified actions were important for advancing Fairfax County’s adopted Goals.

#### Monitoring and Review

In 1993, the Board of Supervisors initiated a four-year Comprehensive Plan review process. The review process supported the goal of regular review, assessment, and revision of the Comprehensive Plan. The inaugural cycle included the 1995 Plan Monitoring Year, the 1996 Policy Plan Review Year, and the 1997-1998 Area Plans Review (APR) Years. As part of the 1995 Plan Monitoring Year, a series of reports were published to describe the existing conditions and trends in the county. The reports covered socio-economic characteristics, land use/housing, transportation, the environment, public facilities, heritage resources, and parks and recreation. The final product of the Policy Review Year was the 1996 State of the Plan report, which presented the results of the evaluation and suggested potential new actions that warranted consideration. The 1996 Policy Plan Review Year involved evaluating the county’s progress on the Planning Commission’s “super priorities” and key objectives in the Policy Plan. The APR years followed the Policy Plan Review Year, evaluating proposed Plan amendments at the planning district, community planning sector, and site-specific levels. In addition to major planning studies, the APR cycles evolved to be the focus of work over the next decade.

#### Fairfax Forward

Following the 2008-2009 North County and 2009-2010 South County APR cycle, a retrospective of the APR process that included extensive public outreach indicated minor changes to the APR process would not address recurring issues, related to timeliness and the fragmented nature of amending the Plan. The effort concluded with a recognition that a more substantial change to the Plan review process was necessary. In early 2012 at the direction of the Planning Commission, the Department of Planning and Zoning began Fairfax Forward, an effort to develop a new means to review the Comprehensive Plan. In order to develop a strategy for the future, staff evaluated recent Plan activity, the strengths and weaknesses of the current APR process, and best practices for Plan review at a local and national level. During the same period, Plan amendments between 2002 and 2010, themes resulting from the amendments, and changes to planned development potential between 2000 and 2010, were assessed. In 2012, a State of the Plan was published to summarize the results of the county’s efforts to implement planning policies over the previous ten years. In addition,

the Concept for Future Development and Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map were updated to reflect Area Plan recommendations. Portions of the Policy Plan and the Area Plans were also revised to reflect current land uses.

The research efforts contributed to recommendations for a major shift in the county's planning process. The proposal that emerged expanded upon the successful aspects of current planning studies, namely related to review and evaluation, and modified areas that needed improvement, including public participation and the organization of the Plan review. Extensive public outreach was conducted to confirm the recommendations. Fairfax Forward culminated in the adoption of a new Plan amendment review process and the implementation of the Pilot Comprehensive Plan Amendment Work Program in July 2013.

### **THE FUTURE OF THE PLANNING PROCESS (2013-Present)**

The Comprehensive Plan Amendment Work Program is the new approach to the planning process that emphasizes greater community engagement. The current planning processes and practices should be monitored to ensure that the objectives of increased public participation and more cohesive planning are met. The recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan should continue to be assessed to gauge correlation with the county's goals and objectives. This activity is also necessary to project trends for the future and will aid the community in understanding the evolution of the county and the growth and development issues that confront it.

## **IMPLEMENTATION/PLAN MONITORING/CITIZEN PARTICIPATION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Comprehensive Plan is used by the Board of Supervisors, the Planning Commission, the Board of Zoning Appeals, county staff, and the public to guide decisions about the built and natural environment, as well as the conservation of cultural and heritage resources. The Policy Plan contains the Board of Supervisors' Goals for Fairfax County and countywide objectives and policies related to the Goals. This hierarchy of policy guides decision-making for countywide, area, and site-specific issues. The Policy Plan is used to provide direction for the Area Plans and guide existing implementation mechanisms (i.e. provide direction for evaluation of zoning proposals). The Area Plans provide detail at the planning district and community planning sector level.

There are many ways to assess how the Comprehensive Plan is evolving to meet local and regional goals. One is to monitor the Plan on a frequent basis. The Board of Supervisors adopted a goal to regularly review, assess, and revise the Comprehensive Plan in order to ensure a thorough on-going review of the Comprehensive Plan. Citizen participation is the foundation of the planning process in Fairfax County, and a wide range of participation opportunities assures active involvement of the public in county planning.

### **MECHANISMS TO IMPLEMENT THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

The Zoning Ordinance - This ordinance and its accompanying map(s) prescribe both the size (intensity and bulk regulations) of lots and the uses which may be placed on the property. All property in the county is mapped to a certain zoning district. The Zoning Ordinance Map, therefore, is a primary means by which the use and intensity for specific land use recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan are implemented. An important component of the rezoning process is the proffer system, which enables a property owner to commit to conditions voluntarily which supplement the Zoning Ordinance and ensure conformance with the Comprehensive Plan.

Subdivision Regulations - This is the basic tool for controlling the subdivision of land. It contains the regulations for dividing parcels of land into lots of any size less than five acres and for the provision of public facilities, if required, to serve the lots so formed. Lots to be developed must conform to applicable zoning regulations.

Public Facilities Manual - This document sets forth the guidelines which govern the design of all facilities which must be constructed to serve new development. Both the Zoning Ordinance and the Subdivision Ordinance make specific reference to the requirements of this manual. The sections of the Policy Plan concerning the environment and public facilities provide guidance to implement the Public Facilities Manual requirements.

Capital Improvement Program - This document is intended to implement the public facilities element of the Comprehensive Plan, serving as a guide toward the efficient and effective provision of public facilities. The Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is published annually and proposes the development, modernization or replacement of physical public projects over a multi-year period. The CIP shows the arrangement of projects in a sequential order based on a schedule of priorities and assigns an estimated cost and anticipated method of financing for each project.

By looking beyond year-to-year budgeting to project what, where, when, and how capital investments should be made, capital programming enables public bodies to maintain an effective level of service for present and future generations, better use the county's limited financial resources, and assist in the coordination of public and private development. In addition, the programming process is valuable as a means of coordinating among county agencies to avoid duplication of efforts and to take advantage of joint planning and development of facilities where possible.

Timing of facility construction is dependent upon a number of variables. For example, in addition to the Capital Improvement Program, projects are evaluated on an annual basis through the county budget process, to determine viability in light of fiscal constraints. Additionally, facilities proposed now may not be necessary in the future due to any number of factors, such as the provision of services through the private sector or changes in federal policy and funding.

### **MECHANISMS TO REVIEW THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

The implementation of the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan is monitored regularly and rigorously to ensure the county is achieving its goals. The primary mechanism for reviewing the Plan is through the Comprehensive Plan Amendment Work Program. The Comprehensive Plan Amendment Work Program schedules planning studies for a three-year period through areawide, neighborhood, and countywide studies. The schedule and order of studies on the work program will be reviewed approximately every two years in order to keep the schedule responsive to community needs, changes in circumstance, and other priorities. The schedule ensures that all elements of the Plan are up-to-date and relevant based on current and future needs.

New planning studies on the work program should be selected using the following criteria based on Comprehensive Plan policy and the experience of past planning efforts:

- Reflect previous authorizations by the Board of Supervisors or deferred Area Plans Review nominations;
- Address emerging community concerns or changes in circumstance;
- Respond to actions by others, such as federal, state, or adjacent jurisdictions;
- Advance major policy objectives, such as promoting environmental protection, fostering revitalization of designated areas, supporting economic development, preserving open space, providing affordable housing, or balancing transportation infrastructure and public facilities services with growth and development;
- Better implement the Concept for Future Development;
- Reflect implementation of Comprehensive Plan guidance through zoning approvals; and/or
- Respond to or incorporate research derived from technical planning or transportation studies.

Between work program reviews, the Board of Supervisors may authorize the consideration of Plan amendments, if circumstances warrant such exceptions. In order to identify those situations when an amendment may be considered, the Board adopted a screening criterion on December 8, 1986. It states that consideration of Board authorized Plan amendments:

‘...will be limited in any year to those that result from emergency situations in which the public health, safety, and welfare or sound land use planning will be harmed if action were deferred until the next appropriate Plan Review Year. Issues of sound land use planning will be evaluated in terms of oversights, inconsistencies, or land use related inequities.’

A request to initiate a Board authorized amendment must be made directly to a member of the Board of Supervisors to sponsor a motion to consider the amendment. If the member agrees to sponsor the motion, the Board must vote to direct staff to evaluate and make a recommendation on the proposed amendment. The Planning Commission subsequently holds a public hearing and makes its recommendation to the Board. The Board of Supervisors holds a public hearing and determines if the amendment should be adopted.

## **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE PLANNING PROCESS**

### Board of Supervisors Goal:

‘Public Participation - The Fairfax County community should be encouraged to take part in the shaping of policies and plans that will affect the environment in which they live and work. Active and timely public participation in actions involving areas of public concern in the county should be encouraged and promoted.’

### Community Participation Mechanisms

Community involvement is important, both to ensure that the Plan is being implemented as intended and to ensure that the Plan reflects current needs, through periodic review. A variety of opportunities exist for a member of the community to become active in the planning process, including the following:

- **Plan Monitoring:** The process for periodic review of the status of the Plan includes publishing a status report and holding public hearings to capture public sentiment about the achievement of Plan policy.
- **The Plan Amendment Process:** The Plan is subject to amendment through the Plan Review process and through the Board Authorized Plan amendments and special studies for urgent cases. Citizens, both as individuals and as members of task forces, can review proposed amendments, make recommendations of their own, and testify at public hearings.
- **Magisterial District Citizen Groups:** Local planning groups monitor planning and zoning activity for their district. These groups often are involved in review of proposed Plan amendments, rezoning cases, and proposals for siting of public facilities.
- **Special Study Task Forces:** When the county undertakes a special planning study of a small area, the Board of Supervisors may appoint a special task force to participate in this project. Such a task force is composed of a cross section of the community, in order to reflect a broad spectrum of views. Public meetings conducted by the Task Force may be held to involve the community.
- **Board-appointed Committees and Commissions:** The Board appoints citizens to be members of standing committees and commissions to advise them on a wide range of



issues, including many that are related to countywide planning. These include the Wetlands Board, the Environmental Quality Advisory Council, and the History Commission to name just a few. The Board also periodically appoints a commission to address a specific task in a finite period of time. For example, the Board appointed the Goals Advisory Commission to review and revise the county's goals in the period of one year.

- **Technology:** The county enhances public participation in the planning process through the use of online and mobile social media. These communication tools can increase access to planning information and provide opportunities for dialogue among users.
- **The county budget process and the Capital Improvement Program:** Public hearings are held during the review of the proposed county budget and also for the Capital Improvements Program. These hearings offer an important opportunity for the community to be involved in the funding of Plan implementation.
- **County Authorities:** The Board of Supervisors, with state mandate, appoints quasi-governmental authorities such as the Park Authority, Housing Authority, and Economic Development Authority. Appointees from the community serve as members of these bodies. The general public can participate in their public meetings and hearings.
- The list above describes the highlights of the opportunities available to the community to become involved in the planning process. Even if a citizen is not a member of an organized group, he or she can:
  - Follow local issues in the press and county staff reports;
  - Attend public hearings to voice opinions on rezoning cases or Plan amendments;
  - Vote on bond issues;
  - Attend meetings of the Board of Supervisors, the Planning Commission, and other commissions and authorities;
  - Propose a Plan amendment through the appropriate process; and
  - Be active in a neighborhood association to monitor local planning and zoning activity.

All of these aspects of public participation strengthen the planning process by tapping the community's most important resource, those who have a stake in enhancing the community's quality of life.

## **INTRODUCTION TO FUNCTIONAL AREAS**

### Purpose

The countywide element acts as a broad statement of county policy to guide decisions toward enhancing the built and natural environment for the benefit of existing and future generations. Both the countywide policy embodied here and the more specific guidelines in the *Concept for Future Development and Land Classification System*, found in a separate document, are to be used together to give direction to the Area Planning process. The Area Plans give more site-specific guidance, from the Planning District down to the Community Planning Sector level. Finally, the entire Comprehensive Plan, made up of the Policy Plan and Area Plan volumes, is used during the development review process.

### Scope

This section of the Plan contains the countywide planning objectives and policies for eleven functional areas.

- Land Use
- Transportation
- Housing
- Environment
- Economic Development
- Heritage Resources
- Public Facilities
- Human Services
- Parks and Recreation
- Revitalization
- Visual and Performing Arts

The functional elements share a common structure. Each begins with an introduction that contains an overview of the issues facing the county, both now and over the next twenty years. This is followed by a statement of the appropriate Board of Supervisors Goal(s). It is assumed that most or all of the goals may have some bearing on all elements; however, only the key goals that pertain to each are cited at the beginning of the corresponding element. The goals are followed by objectives, each with its own set of policies and action agenda items.

The approach used to develop the content of this document involved working through a logical progression from general goals to increasingly more specific objectives, policies and, in some cases, guidelines and/or standards. Goals are broad statements of the community's aspirations. All elements in the Policy Plan use the Board-adopted "Goals for Fairfax County" as their starting point. Objectives, the next step in the hierarchy, have been derived from key points that are stated in or implied by the goals. Thus, objectives are statements that provide further direction for achieving an aspect of a goal. Policies have been derived from the objectives. These policies are approaches for pursuing a given objective. Adopted in the Plan, the policies give guidance, which when pursued, will assist in implementing the objectives. Guidelines and standards, in turn, give more detailed direction for implementing some of the policies.