



PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT

ITEM: PA 2017-CW-5CP
March 8, 2018

GENERAL LOCATION: Countywide

SUPERVISOR DISTRICT: All

PLANNING AREA: All

PLANNING DISTRICT: All

SUB-DISTRICT DESIGNATION: All

PARCEL LOCATION: All

Office Building Repurposing, Phase II (CH)
For additional information about this amendment call (703) 324-1380.

PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING:
Thursday, March 22, 2018 @ 7:30 PM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS PUBLIC HEARING:
Tuesday, May 1, 2018 @ 4:00 PM

**PLANNING STAFF DOES RECOMMEND
THIS ITEM FOR PLAN AMENDMENT**



Reasonable accommodation is available upon 48 hours notice. For additional information about accommodation call the Planning Commission office at (703) 324-2865, or the Board of Supervisors office at (703) 324-3151.

MAP NOT APPLICABLE

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STAFF REPORT FOR POLICY PLAN AMENDMENT 2017-CW-5CP

BACKGROUND

On December 5, 2017, the Board of Supervisors (Board) adopted Plan Amendment (PA) 2016-CW-4CP to facilitate the repurposing of vacant, partially vacant, and/or underutilized office buildings for alternative uses such as residential or institutional uses in the county's Mixed-Use Centers and Industrial Areas, as designated on the Concept for Future Development.¹ The amendment created a new Appendix 13 in the Land Use section of the Policy Plan of the Comprehensive Plan, entitled "Guidelines for Office Building Repurposing," and added definitions to the Glossary of the Comprehensive Plan for related terms, such as "repurposing." The new guidelines and the definitions establish the parameters for building repurposing; provide guidance on the potential types of office building conversions; and describe performance criteria related to compatibility, site design, transportation, public facilities, the environment, affordable housing, and historic preservation.

As adopted, repurposing proposals that meet the performance criteria may be considered in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan during a zoning review even if the proposed use is not specifically recommended in the Plan. The guidance does not preclude the Board from authorizing the consideration of a Comprehensive Plan amendment. In addition to this approval, the Board also directed staff to prepare subsequent plan amendments that evaluate expanding the coverage of the repurposing policy to office buildings in areas located outside of activity centers and to other vacant buildings in addition to offices.

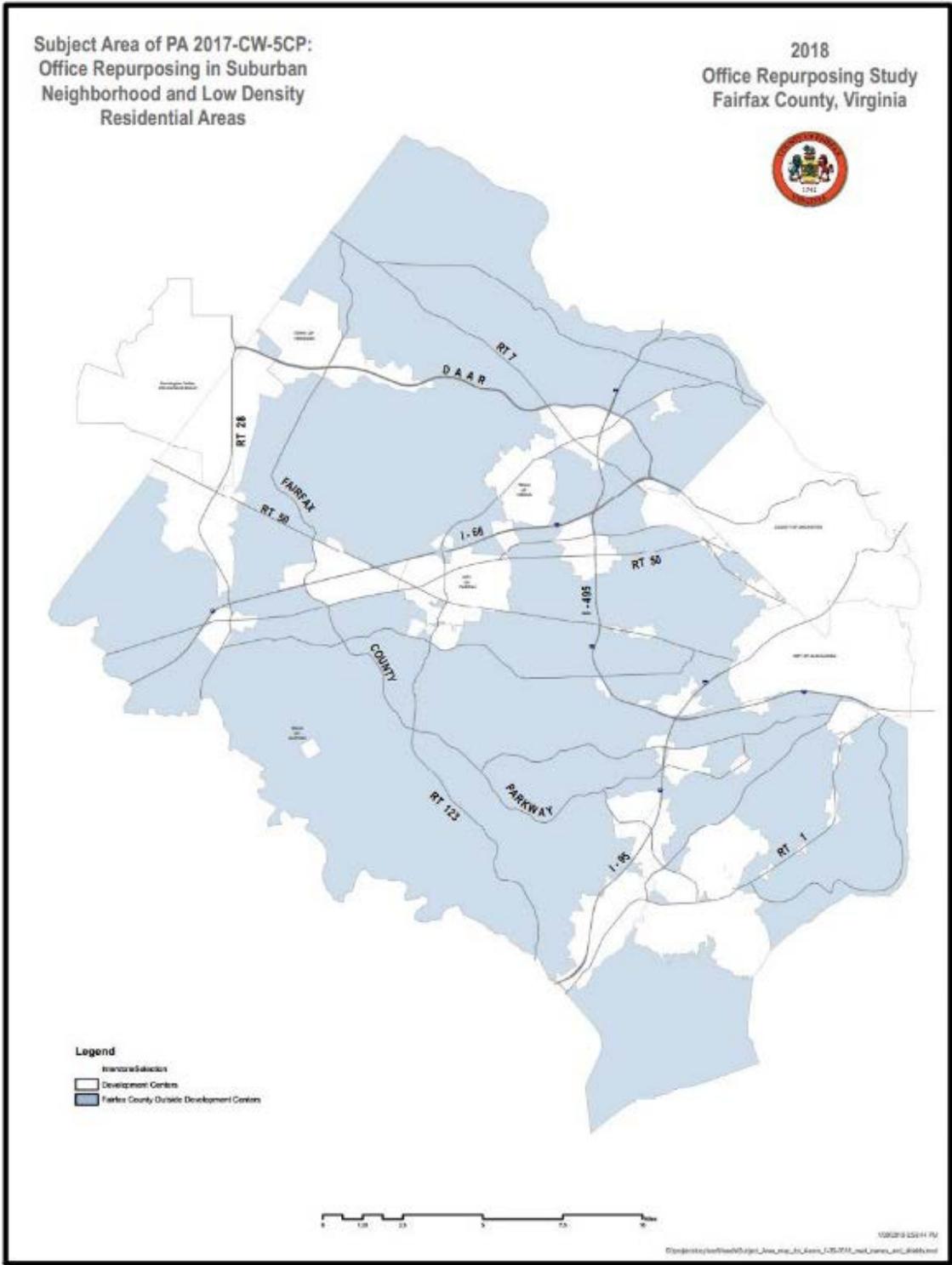
PROPOSED PLAN AMENDMENT

PA 2017-CW-5CP considers extending Land Use Appendix 13, "Guidelines for Office Building Repurposing" to include office buildings in areas designated on the Concept for Future Development as Suburban Neighborhood Areas and Low Density Residential Areas. Suburban Neighborhood Areas are defined as established neighborhoods with a mix of housing types that are stable (little change in land use is expected) and may contain neighborhood-serving retail uses, public facilities, institutional uses, parks, and open space. Low Density Residential Areas are planned for primarily large lot residential uses and open spaces to preserve environmental resources. The map on the following page generally illustrates the geographic extent of these areas in blue. If PA 2017-CW-5CP is adopted, Appendix 13 would affect all office buildings in the county land area over which the Board has land use planning jurisdiction (the towns of Vienna, Herndon, and Clifton; the City of Fairfax; federal and military installations; and airports would not be included).

Consideration of the repurposing policy options for other, non-office buildings, as authorized by the Board in the second part of the follow-on motion, is underway and will be presented to the Board at a later date.

¹ The Concept for Future Development, as adopted in the Comprehensive Plan, generally describes the types of land uses that are appropriate throughout the county through the Land Classification System. The Land Classification System describes the desired future character for each area of the county in terms of eight broad categories.

PA 2017-CW-5CP subject area is shown in blue. Areas in white are those that are either within designated Mixed-Use Centers or Industrial Areas encompassed by Appendix 13, or those areas over which the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors does not have planning jurisdiction.



ANALYSIS

Office Vacancy Outside Activity Centers

As of January 2018, approximately 18 million square feet of office space in the county is vacant. Most of this vacant office space is located in the county’s designated Mixed-Use Centers. The inventory of vacant office space in the county’s Suburban Neighborhoods and Low Density Residential areas was just over 600,000 square feet, which is approximately three percent of the total vacant office space in the county.

A total of 394 office buildings are located in Suburban Neighborhood and Low Density Residential areas. Of these buildings, approximately 80 percent (325 buildings) are fully occupied or less than 10 percent vacant, while 6 percent of the buildings (25 buildings) had vacancy rates greater than 30 percent, as shown in Table 1. As a result, the majority of the buildings may not be likely candidates for significant repurposing projects at this time. More likely, the buildings with vacancy rates of 30 percent or more would seek to repurpose. Although the number of buildings with vacancy rates of 30 percent or more is comparatively small, the buildings represent approximately 50 percent of the total amount of vacant space in the Suburban Neighborhood and Low Density Residential Areas (over 284,000 square feet), as shown in Table 2. If these buildings opted to repurpose, the total amount of vacant office space in Suburban Neighborhoods and Low Density Residential Areas would be significantly reduced.

Table 1. Total Office Buildings and Rentable Office Space by Vacancy Range Outside Activity Centers

Vacancy Rate	Number (No.) of Buildings	Percent of Total No. of Building
All (0-100%)	394	—
10% or less	325	82%
30% or more	25	6%

Table 2. Available Vacant Office Space by Vacancy Range Outside Activity Centers

Vacancy Rate	Available Vacant Square Feet	Percent of Total Vacant Square Feet
30 % or more	284,457	47%
10% or less	47,906	8%
0-100%	607,684	100%

Source: Costar

The office building types surveyed ranged from townhouse-style offices to 4-5 story buildings. The amount of vacant office space in a single building ranged from 500 square feet to 435,000 square feet. The average size of vacant office space is approximately 20,000 square feet.

Economic Success

If the proposed Plan amendment is adopted, the need for Plan amendments on a case-by-case basis would be reduced. Where a Plan amendment would have otherwise been required, adoption

of this policy will decrease the total length of time in the Fairfax County land development process, thereby increasing the speed to market for those buildings. In addition, converting vacant office buildings to other uses can eliminate eyesores, bolster the tax base, and achieve private investment benefits such as upgrades of older buildings with more modern and efficient plumbing, heating and cooling systems. The projects also may provide an opportunity for new publicly accessible open space through the conversion of excess parking spaces.

The Fairfax County Strategic Plan for Economic Success identifies the importance of implementing policies and practices to allow for expedient repurposing of empty or obsolete commercial space, including office space, with other uses as an option to help reduce commercial real estate vacancy. Reducing commercial vacancy rates is critical to the sustained economic vitality of the community. The proposed amendment also supports the county-wide goals to diversify the economy by providing opportunities for alternative location options for small businesses and to create places where people want to be when vacant, partially vacant and/or underutilized office space repurpose to land uses that can add vitality to the community.

Public Engagement

A zoning change, subject to review by the Planning Commission and approval by the Board of Supervisors would be required for a proposed office repurposing project not permitted by the underlying zoning district, and any applicable proffers or development conditions. Such review includes public hearings by both bodies, where opportunities for public input are offered. It should be noted that this Policy Plan amendment, if adopted, would not limit the Board's ability to authorize a Plan amendment for subject properties proposing office repurposing, if desired.

Office Building Conversion Types

The adopted Plan recommends a number of possible uses to which existing vacant, partially vacant and underutilized office buildings located within the county's activity centers, can be converted. These uses include light industrial, industrial flex, urban agriculture, institutional, public facilities, retail and other commercial, residential, live/work, and hotel uses. As previously stated, any proposed conversion from office to an alternative use is expected to be compatible with surrounding existing development and meet the performance criteria contained in the Office Building Repurposing Guidelines.

Residential Uses and Live/Work Uses

While residential uses would likely be the most compatible conversion types within the subject areas of this Plan amendment, this type of conversion may be cost prohibitive in many instances. In addition, there may be increased traffic in the residential peak hour direction as additional residential development would have the same peak hour travel patterns as existing homes in a neighborhood; however, overall daily trips may be reduced as compared to an occupied office building. Senior housing also could be a possible alternative use for office buildings. While there may be impacts from delivery vehicles and workers employed at some of these facilities, the total trips would likely be fewer than an occupied office building. These and other impacts would need to be mitigated, as per the guidance in Appendix 13.

Converting a vacant, partially vacant, or underutilized office building to residential use or residential mixed-use may create an opportunity to increase the supply of affordable housing however, the cost of reconstruction to meet residential building codes may place the price of market rate units beyond the means of many.

Non-Residential Uses

Office buildings that are located on sites that are already buffered from residential neighborhoods could accommodate a number of alternative non-residential uses. Conversion to light industrial or industrial flex uses, such uses as small scale production or repair uses, data centers, or hotel uses could be appropriate for office buildings located along major arterials and in commercial areas outside of activity centers. Schools, libraries and satellite campuses for higher educational institutions also could be viable alternative uses. There may be opportunities to convert some smaller office buildings to additional community-serving retail and service uses such as pharmacies, childcare facilities, educational facilities and professional service businesses. In addition, there may be opportunities to create spaces for new start-up companies and entrepreneurs, including non-profit community service agencies.

Office building conversions to other non-residential uses such as maker spaces or urban agricultural uses that are in or abut stable, residential neighborhoods should be rigorously reviewed. These uses may have additional impacts associated with them, such as noise or delivery trucks, and should be permitted only when the scale of the use will not adversely affect adjacent land uses and the overall character of the neighborhood. Many of these uses would have less overall vehicular traffic impact as compared to the office use. Additional impacts created by the alternative uses as compared to the existing office use would need to be mitigated during development review, as per the guidance in Appendix 13.

CONCLUSION

Expanding the office building repurposing policy recently added to the Comprehensive Plan to apply Countywide better aligns our land development policies with the Strategic Plan for the Economic Success of Fairfax County. The amendment provides the potential to revitalize areas by fostering rehabilitation of existing older buildings and improving landscaping and pedestrian circulation, which is consistent with the Board's goals outlined in the Policy Plan. The amendment also provides flexibility to respond to market conditions and emerging trends.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the following modifications as shown below. New text is shown as underlined.

MODIFY: Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2017 Edition, Policy Plan, as amended through 12-5-2017, Land Use – Appendix 13 Guidelines for Office Building Repurposing, page 41.

“APPENDIX 13**GUIDELINES FOR OFFICE BUILDING REPURPOSING**

High office vacancy rates are caused in part by the evolving needs and preferences of office tenants. Many older office buildings can no longer compete with newer office buildings built in transit-accessible, mixed-use activity centers. Often the vacant buildings cannot readily be leased, resulting in the need to consider improving and marketing the buildings for a different use. Office repurposing encourages the development of a wide range of alternative uses that support the planning objectives for the county’s activity centers and helps to reduce office vacancy and improve the County’s economy. The repurposing of office buildings can be an important element in the county’s strategy to revitalize communities, provide needed housing, and accommodate emerging development trends and uses. Emerging uses, such as food incubators, urban agriculture or flexible live/work units, have been shown to promote economic development and the diversity and vitality that characterize successful communities.

The Guidelines for Office Building Repurposing are intended to facilitate the conversion of vacant, partially vacant, or underutilized office buildings ~~located in designated Community Business Centers (CBCs), Transit Station Areas (TSAs), Suburban Centers, the Tysons Urban Center, and Industrial Areas~~ to alternative land uses not envisioned under the adopted Comprehensive Plan.

Office buildings that are repurposed per these guidelines may be deemed to be in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan. Flexibility is anticipated when applying Plan guidance in the review of zoning applications. Office building repurposing should not preclude future redevelopment nor critical logical consolidation, roadway improvements, parks, and/or other public facilities. Moreover, a repurposed office building should not result in land use conflicts that will compromise the use and/or operations of properties nearby.

The following types or mixture of types of repurposing may be appropriate in the Tysons Urban Center, CBCs, TSAs, Suburban Centers, ~~and~~ Industrial Areas, Suburban Neighborhoods and Low Density Residential Areas:

- Office to Light Industrial or Urban Agriculture. This can include industrial/flex, light manufacturing uses such as makerspaces and 3-D printing; and/or
- Office to Institutional and/or Public Facilities uses.

The following types or mixture of types of repurposing may be appropriate in the Tysons Urban Center, CBCs, TSAs, ~~and~~ Suburban Centers, Suburban Neighborhoods and Low Density Residential Areas:

- Office to Retail and other Commercial uses;
- Office to Indoor Recreational uses;
- Office to Residential use;
- Office to Live/Work use; and/or,
- Office to Hotel use.

The following performance-based strategy is intended to be used to review proposals for repurposing existing office buildings for alternative uses. This guidance sets forth criteria to ensure proposals are compatible with surrounding uses and can be supported by existing infrastructure. Because the repurposing of office buildings presents unique challenges and opportunities, flexibility in achieving certain objectives may be afforded, particularly when the conversion will not significantly change the building form and footprint.

Although there are recommendations and guidance for residential development and uses throughout the Comprehensive Plan, the Comprehensive Plan does not and should not be read to suggest, request, or require any proffered condition for any particular site, development or use.

1. Compatibility:

Office repurposing should occur in a manner that is compatible with the existing and planned surrounding development. A complementary relationship is expected with adjoining properties and surrounding neighborhoods, especially in cases of proximity to lower density residential uses. Office building repurposing in areas within or adjacent to Suburban Neighborhood Areas or Low Density Residential Areas should be considered only when the use will not adversely impact adjacent land uses and the overall character of neighborhood. Landscaped buffers and screening should be utilized where necessary to achieve visual separation to minimize potential adverse impacts.

Consideration of the location of residential conversions should ensure that the new use is not isolated from other residential uses and is located in areas where services and amenities that support residential uses, such as schools, shopping, parks, and other recreational opportunities are provided.

2. Transportation:

Opportunities to improve site access, internal circulation, frontage, and off-site connections and reduce excess parking should be assessed and provided for all transportation modes. Incorporating multimodal frontage improvements should enhance the pedestrian, bicycle, and transit user's experience. An evaluation of the transportation impacts should be provided. A proposed development that is equal to or generates less vehicle trips than an occupied office building and/or has the ability to implement a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) program to lessen the vehicle impacts from the proposed use is encouraged. If the proposed use generates additional traffic, then appropriate mitigations, including a TDM program, should be provided.

3. Site Design:

The repurposing of existing office buildings should include consideration of streetscape, landscaping and stormwater management improvements. High quality site design is encouraged. The streetscape should be designed to promote a pleasant pedestrian experience. This includes well-landscaped public spaces such as squares and plazas; urban parks; courtyards; an integrated pedestrian system; and measures to mitigate the visual impact and presence of parking. Additional landscaping may improve the general appearance of a site and

provide a buffer between uses as appropriate to create effective transitions as needed. Repurposing may afford opportunities to replace excess surface parking with stormwater management facilities, open space, or other site amenities. Flexibility in applying these objectives is appropriate when considering office buildings with unique site characteristics or constraints.

4. Schools, Parks, And Other Public Facilities

Proposals should demonstrate that impacts to schools, parks, and other public facilities caused by any change to residential use will be addressed proportionally to the number and type of units, using the standards typically used to evaluate rezoning applications. The Urban Parks Framework should be applied as appropriate to ensure that office building repurposing results in quality, on-site public park space and recreational amenities to serve new residents, employees, and visitors. Opportunities for providing community meeting rooms should be evaluated with repurposing proposals.

5. Environment

The repurposing of buildings may provide opportunities for improvements in energy efficiency and other green building practices. Such opportunities should be identified and considered for incorporation into building and/or site design. Similarly, noise mitigation should be provided where needed and feasible. Stormwater objectives should be met; however, in cases where site constraints render achieving stormwater management objectives impractical, other opportunities to reduce impervious surfaces and implement quality and quantity controls should be identified. The repurposing of buildings should be pursued in a manner that will support the protection and restoration of tree canopy. Efforts should be pursued to protect high quality vegetation and provide additional tree cover within landscaping concepts, consistent with site design needs.

6. Affordable And Workforce Dwelling Units

For office to residential conversions, affordable housing should be provided in accordance with the Zoning Ordinance and the Workforce Housing policy. However, some flexibility may be appropriate when applying the policy to live/work conversions.”

7. Historic Preservation

Buildings subject to conversion should first undergo appropriate historic preservation review, including coordination with county staff, to foster preservation and minimize potential impacts to structures that may have historic significance.”

COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN MAP:

The Comprehensive Land Use Plan Map will not change.

TRANSPORTATION PLAN MAP:

The Countywide Transportation Plan Map will not change.