

# Community Design Plan

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## INTENT

An attractive, well-designed County will attract quality development, instill civic pride, improve the visual character of the community, and create a strong, positive image for Prince William County within the region and the nation.

The intent of the Community Design Plan is to present general guidelines for the effective and efficient design of new residential, commercial, employment, and mixed-use development and for development of existing areas within the County. The Plan applies to both public and private development projects. It should be used by citizens, developers, and public officials in the decision-making process for applications for rezonings, special use permits, and Comprehensive Plan amendments, as well as for administrative consideration of site and subdivision plans.

The Community Design Plan contains the goals of community design, specific policies, and action strategies that encourage innovation and imagination in building design and site planning, while ensuring that certain universal principles of good community design are upheld. Certain action strategies advocate changes to existing site development ordinances and standards in an effort to achieve alternative compliance or a new standard and to foster better, more creative, and more sustainable building and site designs.

The Community Design Plan will be supplemented by "Community Design Guidelines," a series of graphics that illustrate the policies and action strategies contained in this chapter and approved by the Board of County Supervisors. These graphics shall be updated and supplemented with appropriate examples of attractive and appropriate building and/or site design or other site features that meet the goals and policies of this chapter.

***GOAL: Provide quality development and a quality visual environment throughout Prince William County for residents, businesses, and visitors.***

***GOAL: Create livable and attractive communities.***

**DES-POLICY 1: ENCOURAGE SITE, ARCHITECTURAL, SIGNAGE, AND LANDSCAPE DESIGNS THAT COMPLEMENT THE SCALE AND CHARACTER OF EXISTING AND PLANNED DEVELOPMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT AREA AND IN THE RURAL AREA.**

### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Require generalized development plans submitted with applications for rezonings, special use permits, and, where appropriate, public facility reviews to include

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architectural, sign, lighting, and landscape compatibility for all shopping centers, employment areas, and mixed-use developments.

2. Ensure that signs are compatible in design, scale, material, style, and color with other site amenities, with buildings and landscaping, and with both the overall design character of the development in question and any adjacent development.
3. Ensure that signs for individual uses in mixed-use developments are designed and installed consistent with a developmentwide sign program.
4. Encourage the development of a hierarchy of appropriately scaled entry and directional signs.
5. Encourage the incorporation of signs into a development's landscape plans, such as through the use of trees and shrubs to integrate signs into the landscape.

## **DES-POLICY 2: ENCOURAGE SITE, BUILDING, AND LANDSCAPE DESIGNS THAT RESULT IN THE CREATION OF SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION AND COMMUNITY OPEN SPACE.**

### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Encourage the location of public open spaces and facilities in new developments close to active uses--commercial uses, community services, employment uses, and schools.
2. Encourage the provision of pedestrian links between and among commercial properties, community facilities, and nearby residential neighborhoods.
3. Encourage the clear delineation of pedestrian ways in commercial parking lots and other thoroughfares for public use, through the use of landscaping, lighting, signage, contrasting pavement, pavement marking, or through other innovative treatments.
4. Encourage the provision of wider-than-required sidewalks in nonresidential areas with high levels of pedestrian activity.
5. Incorporate the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles of the Prince William County Police Department into site and building designs, to increase user safety and security.

## **DES-POLICY 3: ENCOURAGE THE USE OF RIDESHARING, TRANSIT, AND OTHER MASS TRANSPORTATION THROUGH THE DESIGN OF COMFORTABLE, SAFE, AND CONVENIENTLY LOCATED FACILITIES.**

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## **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Encourage, through community design, the orientation of development to ride-sharing, transit, bus, or other mass transportation.
2. Develop design standards for new transportation-related facilities that ensure the creation of safe, comfortable, and attractive places.
3. Provide shelters and route information at bus stops and park-and-ride lots, where appropriate.

## **DES-POLICY 4: UPGRADE THE VISUAL QUALITY OF COUNTY GATEWAYS AND MAJOR TRAVEL CORRIDORS.**

### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Create landscape treatments and install appropriate gateway signage and lighting at each of the County's major gateways.
2. Prepare, in cooperation with Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the private sector, landscape plans to improve the scenic quality of highly visible areas along interstate and regional highways and major County thoroughfares, including County-designated Highway Corridor Overlay Districts (HCODs).
3. Use indigenous, drought-tolerant plant species for gateway and roadside landscape improvements.
4. Use wildflowers, meadow plantings, and reforestation at gateways and along major travel corridors.
5. Seek grant funding to support forest preservation and reforestation programs for County-owned properties and land within public rights-of-way.

## **DES-POLICY 5: ESTABLISH A HIERARCHY OF COMMUNITY STREETS WITH APPROPRIATELY DESIGNED STREETSAPES.**

### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Reinforce the hierarchy of streets, through the use of trees, shrubs, ground covers, lighting, and signage that are scaled appropriately to the street's width and function.
2. Facilitate the location of utility easements within public rights-of-way, and the collocation of utilities within easements, through County coordination with VDOT and local utility companies.

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3. Update the Design and Construction Standards Manual (DCSM) to add detailed streetscape standards.

## **DES-POLICY 6: INCORPORATE THE COMMUNITY DESIGN PLAN INTO THE COUNTY'S DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESSES.**

### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Require development proposed under rezonings, special use permits, Comprehensive Plan amendments, and public facility reviews, when appropriate, to address the principles and standards of the Community Design Guidelines.
2. Encourage development for which only full site plan approval is required to address the principles and standards of the Community Design Guidelines.

## **DES-POLICY 7: ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF WELL-FUNCTIONING RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL AREAS, AND THE IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT OF EXISTING RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL AREAS.**

### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Prepare, in conjunction with development proposals and in coordination with the private sector, design guidelines that address landscaping, lighting, street furniture, and signage for the County's existing commercial areas.
2. Locate, when appropriate, new public buildings and associated public space in the heart of the County's Development Area, to encourage economically viable, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use community centers.
3. Prepare design (line consolidation, undergrounding, or line relocation) and public or private financing plans to reasonably minimize the negative visual impact of overhead utilities. The plans should include strategies to encourage the participation of property owners.
4. Encourage the consolidation of access points and reconfigure internal circulation drives to improve vehicular and traffic safety, in a manner that does not cause internal congestion. Encourage the creation of interparcel connections to permit vehicular movement between adjacent commercial properties, where appropriate and where such connections will not cause internal congestion.
5. Encourage the provision of shelter for pedestrians, complementary building designs (including pad sites), clearly designated building entries, integrated signage (with complementary materials, lettering, color), and complementary lighting in the design/redesign of building facades visible from public ways.

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6. Encourage the provision of outdoor dining in commercial areas adjacent to eating establishments.

## **DES-POLICY 8: ENCOURAGE, IN APPROPRIATE LOCATIONS, THE ORIENTATION OF NEW STRUCTURES TOWARDS ADJACENT RIGHTS-OF-WAY, TO CREATE WELL-DEFINED PUBLIC STREETS AND SPACES.**

### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Encourage the placement of a portion of the required parking in the rear of commercial buildings, with provision made for convenient and well-defined access from that parking to the building(s) it serves.
2. Update the DCSM to incorporate design and engineering standards for alleys and rear and side yard parking areas, including, and within a "town center" or similar plan, narrow neighborhood streets with on-street parking and alleys at the rear of properties in order to minimize the impact of paved areas in new developments.
3. Encourage the location of new buildings close to the street to minimize the scale of new arterial and collector streets.
4. Discourage the location of large expanses of parking between public streets and building entrances.
5. Encourage structured parking to minimize parking footprint.

## **DES-POLICY 9: PRESERVE AND ENHANCE THE UNIQUE ARCHITECTURAL AND LANDSCAPE QUALITIES OF THE COUNTY'S RURAL AREA.**

### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Design new commercial structures in the Rural Area as a cluster of small-scale buildings to minimize their mass and to blend them in with existing buildings.
2. Use appropriate indigenous plant materials and traditional planting patterns in areas visible from public thoroughfares so that new buildings blend into their landscape surroundings.
3. Provide site plans and building designs that protect the existing visual quality and natural resource values that make these areas distinctive.
4. Encourage commercial development in the Rural Area to provide design compatibility of new and existing development.

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5. Encourage any new development in the Rural Area to preserve the visual character of the rural landscape by providing appropriate building setbacks, with landscaped/preserved open space occupying the setback area; and preserving important scenic resources--hedgerows, mature trees, farm buildings, walls and fences, and open fields.

## **DES-POLICY 10: ENCOURAGE SITE PLANS AND BUILDING DESIGNS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT THAT ENHANCE THE SETTINGS OF THE COUNTY'S DESIGNATED CULTURAL RESOURCES, AS IDENTIFIED IN THE CULTURAL RESOURCES PLAN.**

### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Consider the architectural and landscape features of archaeological and historic sites and structures when developing adjacent properties.
2. Encourage, where appropriate, the preservation of views to and from historic properties through the protection of farm fields, meadows, and woodlands.

## **DES-POLICY 11: ENCOURAGE INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO STORM-WATER MANAGEMENT.**

### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Develop, in cooperation with the private sector, guidelines for the design of innovative stormwater management facilities and systems.
2. Encourage the use of natural stormwater management designs as wet ponds, as opposed to dry detention ponds. Where appropriate, develop systems that function as extensions of a site's natural drainage properties.
3. Encourage innovative design and landscaping of any dry detention ponds.
4. Encourage the design and construction of regional stormwater wet ponds, if allowed by federal regulations. Where appropriate, encourage the provision of these regional facilities as extensions of the County's public/private open space network.
5. Encourage the use of stormwater facilities as architectural features of new development.
6. Encourage minimizing the amount of impervious surfaces in new development through the use of appropriate low maintenance techniques, and the removal of paved areas in existing developments, where applicable, to minimize runoff.

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## **DES-POLICY 12: FIT NEW DEVELOPMENT INTO NATURAL LANDFORMS.**

### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Preserve, protect, and restore, wherever possible in new development, the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation.
2. Encourage the integration of public open space areas into neighboring properties to avoid fragmentation of open spaces and natural areas.
3. Minimize clearing and cut-and-fill operations. Encourage the placement of buildings to minimize the need for excessive grading. Avoid disturbance of steep slopes, particularly up-slope of important natural resource areas.
4. Align new roads to follow the natural contours of the land.
5. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to revise the method of calculating residential building heights to encourage housing designs that minimize grading.

## **DES-POLICY 13: ENCOURAGE THE PREPARATION OF PLANS FOR THE PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION OF LANDSCAPE RESOURCES.**

### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Amend the DCSM to incorporate the landscape conservation and replanting guidelines contained in this chapter.
2. Encourage revegetation that employs appropriate indigenous species and the restoration of natural landscape features to mitigate the negative impact of development on native plant and animal communities.
3. Encourage re-establishment of the forest edge, where clearing of forested areas is required, through the installation of appropriate edge and understory species.
4. Encourage eradication or control of exotic nuisance plant species, where appropriate.