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PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The 1998 Comprehensive Plan for Prince William County contains a clear strategy for responsible, fiscally sound growth to produce a vibrant, prosperous, stable, "livable" community. The Plan encourages new opportunities for high-end housing and targeted economic development that will strengthen the County's tax base and balance existing housing and economic activities. It seeks to ensure a high quality of life for all County residents and heighten the County's image--by increasing open space, reducing residential densities, maintaining current planned levels of nonresidential development, providing adequate and affordable public services to meet the needs of current and future residents, and improving the design of sites and buildings.

The goals, policies, and action strategies in the 1998 Comprehensive Plan have been shaped by citizen preferences, the County's Strategic Plan, sound planning principles, and a need to balance the competing demands for development and the preservation of the County's distinct, irreplaceable character. The following five general goals for the future development of Prince William County represent the vision within which the 1998 Comprehensive Plan was crafted:

- **Strong economic growth**
 - ◆ New and expanded employment opportunities
 - ◆ An improved County tax base--higher ratio of jobs to houses, nonresidential to residential
 - ◆ Higher-income professional jobs and higher-income housing
 - ◆ Greater number of targeted industries
 - ◆ Public and private investment in major economic activity centers to encourage quality economic growth
- **Affordable, practical, and fiscally sound residential and economic development**
 - ◆ Infill development, mixed-use, and development of already developed areas to maximize efficiency of existing infrastructure
 - ◆ Updated levels of public service standards
 - ◆ Capital Improvements Program and operating budget reflective of Comprehensive Plan policies and action strategies
- **Prince William County as an attractive, "livable" community**
 - ◆ Good community design important to quality of life for County residents and to attract targeted businesses
 - ◆ Preservation of areas of rural character and significant cultural/historical resources

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- ◆ Revitalization of older commercial and residential areas of the County
 - ◆ Sound environmental quality
 - ◆ A variety of land use types and densities to make the County an interesting place to live or visit
- **Cost-effective and Plan-based transportation systems**
 - ◆ Roadway widths and locations determined by existing and planned densities
 - ◆ Major new roadways to serve designated economic activity centers
 - ◆ Regional mass transportation “hubs” to develop at high-density mixed use

THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

A comprehensive plan is a general guide to the location, character, and extent of proposed or anticipated land use, including public facilities. It provides guidance for land use development decisions made by the Planning Commission and the Board of County Supervisors.

The Code of Virginia requires each jurisdiction to adopt a comprehensive plan for the development of land within its boundaries. The Comprehensive Plan is based on an analysis of current land use and future growth and the facilities needed to serve existing and future residents, such as roads, parks, water and sewer systems, schools, fire stations, and libraries. The Code requires that comprehensive plans be reviewed every five years, to ensure that the plan is responsive to current circumstances and that its goals are still supported by the citizenry.

The Comprehensive Plan is implemented through the County’s Subdivision Ordinance, Zoning Ordinance, Zoning Map, and Design and Construction Standards Manual. The Comprehensive Plan is, in turn, the basis for amendments to these regulatory measures. The Plan is also implemented through the County’s annual Capital Improvements Program.

The Prince William Board of County Supervisors first adopted a Comprehensive Plan in 1974. New plans or amendments to an existing plan were adopted by the Board in 1982, 1986, 1989, and 1990.

The 1998 Prince William County Comprehensive Plan contains chapters outlining goals, policies, and action strategies for the following:

- Community Design
- Cultural Resources
- Economic Development
- Environment
- Fire and Rescue

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- Housing
- Libraries
- Long-Range Land Use
- Parks and Open Space
- Potable Water
- Schools
- Sewers
- Telecommunications
- Transportation

The Comprehensive Plan also contains a series of sector plans for specific areas.

The Comprehensive Plan contains 18 land use categories and divides the County into two general land use areas, each with a different land use character and different land development policies.

The Development Area is that portion of Prince William County that has already been developed or is expected to be developed at residential densities substantially greater than those in the remainder of the County. It also contains established commercial, office, and industrial areas, as well as undeveloped or underdeveloped land expected to meet the County's projected growth, both residential and tax base-enhancing economic activities. The Development Area is divided into urban and suburban sub-areas. The Comprehensive Plan encourages infill of the Development Area, to maximize the opportunities to provide public services in a cost-efficient manner and to provide an environmentally sound development pattern. Both public water and sewer would be provided in the Development Area.

The Rural Area is that portion of Prince William County containing agricultural, open space, forestry, and large-lot residential land uses, as well as two federal parks. Large-lot residential clusters, providing large tracts of permanent open space, is an alternative residential pattern permitted in the Rural Area. The Rural Area designation helps preserve the County's agricultural economy and resources, the quality of the groundwater supply, and the present open space and rural character. Sufficient vacant and underdeveloped land exists outside the Rural Area that the Rural Area is not needed to accommodate further residential growth for the next 20 years. The Rural Area may be served by public water facilities but not by public sewer facilities, except under the emergency conditions identified in the Sewer Plan or to serve specific public facilities. Designation of the Rural Area and application of the development goals, policies, and action strategies for it are intended to help avoid the negative economic, social, and environmental characteristics of sprawl development.

BACKGROUND

In March 1996, the Prince William Board of County Supervisors appointed a 24-member task force to review the 1990 Comprehensive Plan and recommend to the

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Planning Commission possible revisions to that Plan. The Planning Office staff served as a technical resource to the task force, as did the staffs of other County agencies responsible for implementation of the various policies and action strategies contained in individual Comprehensive Plan chapters.

The task force, drawing from citizen surveys, citizen comments, and citizen requests for Comprehensive Plan amendments, as well as the County's Strategic Plan, its Capital Improvements Program, and budgets and other Board-endorsed policies and plans, presented its recommendations to the Planning Commission in February 1997.

The Planning Commission held a series of public work sessions, public comment periods, and public hearings during March and April 1997 before forwarding its recommendations to the Board of County Supervisors. In June 1997, the Board formally initiated the Comprehensive Plan Update and returned it to the Planning Commission for public hearings. The Planning Commission hearings on the various Comprehensive Plan chapters were held during the period September 1997-May 1998.

LEVEL OF SERVICE (LOS) STANDARDS

Five of the Comprehensive Plan chapters address facilities and services provided by the County to its residents and businesses: Fire and Rescue, Libraries, Parks and Open Space, Schools, and Transportation. The agencies responsible for these services have established levels of service (LOS) standards. These LOS are standards by which each agency measures the quality of the service it provides. The standards are derived from government requirements (such as classroom size), professional or industry standards (such as those provided by the Institute of Transportation Engineers for road capacity and traffic movement), and from citizen surveys and citizen expectations.

The 1998 Comprehensive Plan appropriately establishes the relationship between the demand for public services created by new development and the County's fiscal ability to provide those services at the LOS standards set forth in the Plan. The Virginia Code provides for conditional zoning (proffers), voluntarily made by rezoning applicants, to mitigate the service effects of new development. The LOS standards provide an objective justification for mitigation requests. While the County is still responsible for funding service operations, proffers provide a valuable source of capital funding that relates service demands to service costs.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Prince William County is the third most populous county in Virginia. In December 1997, the population was estimated to be almost 265,000. This figure represents a 22 percent growth since the 1990 population of 215,000. The County has projected a 2020 population twice that of the 1990 population, if development occurs according to the land development concepts in the 1990 Comprehensive Plan.

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One of the most significant concerns regarding preparation of the 1998 Comprehensive Plan was the cost of providing quality County services--particularly schools--to a burgeoning population, and to the populations anticipated at buildout of the 1990 Comprehensive Plan. In current dollars, for example, each new elementary school is estimated to cost \$10 million to construct (including land costs) and \$2.8 million annually to operate; middle schools each cost \$19 million and \$5.5 million, respectively; and the corresponding costs for each high school is \$38 million and \$11.7 million. County revenues, so heavily dependent upon residential tax dollars to support the annual capital and operating budgets, are severely stretched to plan and program public services and facilities to existing residents.

To meet citizen demands for quality services, for an appropriate linkage between development and those services, and for managed growth, the 1998 Comprehensive Plan limits the amount of new residential development through lowering density levels in some land use classifications and designating the Rural Area for 10-acre residential lots and clusters. As a result, the demand for new services will be lessened, so that the County can concentrate its spending to catch up with existing demand, to fully utilize the existing infrastructure within the Development Area, and to target new infrastructure to designated Quality Development Areas.

It is anticipated that, taking into account already approved rezonings and approved though unbuilt site plans, about 50,000 new dwelling units can be built under the 1998 Comprehensive Plan. Service demands--for new schools, parks, libraries, fire and rescue facilities, roads--will be lessened accordingly, bringing future development closer to the affordability and high standards of service the County and its residents seek.

Development Evaluation Criteria

The Comprehensive Plan land use classifications have been mapped on the Long-Range Land Use Plan Map based upon criteria as set throughout the Comprehensive Plan as goals, objectives, policies, and action strategies. Examples of these development evaluation criteria are: proximity to commercial or employment areas, provision of public facilities, environmental and cultural resources, and transportation access. These criteria apply to development, where appropriate, within both the Development Area and the Rural Area. Within each land use classification, there is a range of density or intensity. All areas with the same land use classification, however, are not equal in terms of their location or the time frame within which their development is appropriate. Currently, some areas are more readily accessed by transportation, more readily connected to the sewer system, closer to schools and, thus, better able to accommodate, at established levels of service, a higher level of density or intensity. As utilities and facility networks are expanded and levels of service increased, consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, potential density and intensity will increase accordingly, but always within the established density or intensity ranges set forth by the Comprehensive Plan. Encouraging more intense uses in areas already well serviced, and infill

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of well-serviced areas already substantially developed, will discourage leap-frog development and sprawl development extended into areas of the County poorly serviced, and land speculation, while allowing the County to better focus limited fiscal resources.

These "Development Evaluation Criteria" aid in the determination of whether a project is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, specifically with regard to the appropriate specific density/intensity within the range established by the Long-Range Land Use Plan Map for a given area and project. The criteria presented below are consistent with the goals, objectives, policies, and action strategies of the Comprehensive Plan and with the use of the "proffer" approach to conditional zoning as practiced in Prince William County. The criteria are not presented in order of importance.

1. Public Services

The evaluation system would be used by County staff in reviewing and evaluating development proposals with regard to their impacts on public services, in accordance with the LOS standards established in the Fire and Rescue, Library, Parks and Open Space, and Schools Plan chapters of the Comprehensive Plan. Potential impacts on police and housing services would also be evaluated.

2. Transportation

Proposed development can have numerous effects on the County's transportation system. Transportation impact mitigation measures should be incorporated into the approved Transportation Impact Analysis that accompanies appropriate Comprehensive Plan amendment, rezoning, and special use permit requests. In addition, the following criteria shall, at a minimum, be considered in determining an appropriate density or intensity:

- **Residential Site Location.** If the development is a residential project, is the site close to or within walking distance of existing or planned employment areas? Is the site close to or within walking distance to shopping and services? Will the development provide effective pedestrian access between the residential project and these nearby employment and/or commercial and service areas and/or public buildings and facilities?
- **Proximity to Existing/Programmed Transportation Facilities.** Is the site in the general and reasonable vicinity of an arterial or collector that is improved or funded for improvement to the standards identified in the Transportation Plan, as reflected by the Capital Improvements Program or the Secondary/Primary Road Improvements Program?
- **Existing or Planned Capacity of the Transportation Facilities.** Does the impacted transportation system have the capacity to absorb the trips generated

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by the development proposal without degrading the adopted level of service? If not, are on-site and off-site measures proposed to offset the impacts?

- **Transportation Systems Management.** Does the development proposal address a broad range of programs and techniques to increase the efficiency of the transportation system? Examples include participation in a transportation funding district, vanpooling, staggered work hours, employer-assisted transit use incentives, shuttle services, pedestrian access between the residential and/or nonresidential development and public transportation, etc.
- **Transit.** Is the project in the urban portions of the Development Area and within walking distance of transit services or a Transit Corridor? Is effective pedestrian access provided between the project and the transit service(s) provided? Does the project account for an on-site commuter parking area or are other transit facilities being provided?
- **Nonmotorized Facilities.** Nonmotorized facilities include items such as trails, sidewalks, and bikeways. Does the project provide internal nonmotorized facilities? Does the project link to external nonmotorized facilities and contribute to Countywide nonmotorized facilities in accordance with the Transportation Plan?

3. Environmental Resources

The protection of environmental features is another important evaluation criterion. Items for consideration should include, but not be limited to, the following:

- reduced surface runoff,
- reduced erosion potential,
- increased pollutant removal potential,
- nutrient management,
- control of toxic substances,
- protection of rare, threatened or endangered species,
- protection of habitat function,
- avoidance of direct disturbance of aquatic habitats,
- protection of aquatic habitats,
- tree coverage preservation,
- clustering of residential units resulting in densities no greater than that possible under conventional development standards to further valuable environmental objectives, and
- preserving open space.

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4. Mixed-Use Projects

Mixed-use projects provide an efficient development pattern that can foster economic development, provide diversity in land use, and reduce the number and the length of automobile trips. These projects are encouraged in appropriate locations in Prince William County, as shown on the Long-Range Land Use Plan Map. The increased efficiency of such projects warrants consideration for encouraging their creation.

5. Planned Unit Development (PUD)

PUD refers to master-planned communities. A PUD is intended to promote the efficient use of land, allow a compatible mix of land uses on a group of parcels, obtain design flexibility not otherwise possible, ensure efficient and effective traffic circulation, preserve open space and sensitive environmental and historic features, ensure compatibility with surrounding properties, and ensure services necessary to the development. A Master Zoning Plan (MZP), in accordance with the Zoning Ordinance, is adopted for each PUD that generally outlines the location and extent of densities, intensities, public facilities, and open space. PUDs are appropriate only in the Development Area.

6. Cultural Resources

Development proposals that impact significant cultural resources are to be evaluated with regard to provision of long-term measures to protect the integrity of such resources. A development proposal that proposes measures to preserve, renovate or otherwise restore an archaeological site, historic site, historic structure or viewshed may qualify for consideration of higher development intensity or density potential.

7. Planning and Design

The consistency of a project with the existing and planned land uses is greatly influenced by its design. The Community Design Plan provides more specific guidance regarding those features necessary to create desirable, visually pleasing, and economically sustainable communities. A proposal for a Comprehensive Plan amendment, rezoning, special use permit, provisional use permit, and site or subdivision plans should be in concert with the Community Design Plan.

8. Economic Development

Development proposals that provide for increased targeted and basic employment opportunities and serve to diversify the County's economy are to be encouraged and evaluated positively and in conjunction with other criteria listed above. The 1998 Comprehensive Plan encourages developments and improvements which

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strengthen and fill out the major economic activity centers identified in the Economic Development Plan and focus public capital improvements in those centers, including the existing residential communities which support them, so that they remain viable, visually pleasing, and prosperous.

9. Fiscal Feasibility Analysis

A fiscal feasibility analysis should be submitted as part of a development proposal as a tool to measure the effects of the proposal on the net public costs or revenues that the project will generate.

10. Phasing

Proposed development in areas planned for Regional Employment Center (REC), Community Employment Center (CEC), Regional Commercial Center (RCC), and Regional Recreation Center (RRC) shall include a phasing plan that ensures development in accordance with the purpose and intent of that land use classification. The phasing plan should consist of a general development plan or Master Zoning Plan (MZP) and, if appropriate, a table that identifies how and in general where primary and secondary uses shall be developed. Each general development plan or MZP and table shall include an inventory of acreage devoted to the primary and secondary uses, as defined in the Long-Range Land Use Plan.

In summary, the development evaluation criteria:

- set forth, or reference, Comprehensive Plan components, including standards, levels of service, and other facets of urban development. These criteria should be uniformly utilized by the applicant when seeking rezoning, special use permit and/or comprehensive plan amendment approval, as well as, where proffered or conditioned, site or subdivision plan approval;
- allow for more exact development intensities to be identified within established ranges of density and intensity;
- respect the basic development potential of land as reflected by the 1998 Comprehensive Plan; and
- require input from the public and private sectors during implementation.

NOTE: If and when a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is incorporated into, or when an existing FAR is proposed for amendment in, the Zoning Ordinance, those FAR intensity ranges should be evaluated under the relevant Comprehensive Plan components such as those reflected and/or referenced above as one approach in determining actual FAR values.