

1.0 Introduction

Stafford County is a dynamic community. It includes a mix of suburban neighborhoods and rural enclaves. Retail centers and office and industrial parks provide shopping and employment opportunities throughout the County. The County is strategically located at a crossroads of major transportation routes which carries both positive and negative impacts to the quality of life. The built environment of Stafford County is relatively new. Since the construction of Interstate 95 in the 1960's through the County, population has doubled every 20 years.

The result of Stafford's burgeoning growth has been prosperity for some, but with prosperity comes valid concerns. Increasing traffic, the effects of development on the County's natural and cultural resources, the effects on the overall environment, as well as housing affordability and the ability to provide adequate public services are all increasing concerns for residents of Stafford County.

As the community continues to grow, the need for planning is ever greater. This document serves as a guide for future development of Stafford County over the next 20 years.

The Plan tells us where we are today and through goals and objectives, policies, and implementation tools, guides the physical development of the county--the location, type, and intensity of future land use. The plan includes goals, objectives and policies for sustainability; fiscal responsibility; the environment; health, safety and welfare; housing; transportation; economic development; education; and heritage resources.

The Stafford County Comprehensive Plan emphasizes maintaining and enhancing the quality of life for existing and future residents of the County.



View of Crow's Nest from Accokeek Creek

1.1 Background

Stafford County is located approximately 40 miles south of Washington, D.C., and sixty miles north of Richmond, Virginia. The County covers 277 square miles of generally level to rolling land, with elevations ranging from sea level to 425 feet. The County is bordered by Prince William County on the north, Fauquier County and Culpeper County on the west, Spotsylvania County and the City of Fredericksburg below the Rappahannock River to the south, and the Potomac River and King George County on the east.

Established in 1664, Stafford County has a rich history from pre-colonial days to the industrialization of the nineteenth century. The County has important



Stafford County in Regional Context

associations with major events and people in our nation's history. This history is documented by the County's bountiful archaeological and architectural remains.

Stafford remained mostly a rural community until the construction of Interstate 95 during the late 1960s. Since that time, the County has experienced a growth rate that, for a period of time, ranked it among the fastest growing jurisdictions in the nation.

The County's proximity to major industrial and commercial markets, combined with its high percentage of vacant land, is attractive for residential, commercial, and industrial development. Since Stafford County is located within commuting distance of major employment centers to the north and south, it continues to be an attractive location for new development. While the rate of growth has slowed in recent years, residential and commercial development is still occurring to meet the demand for housing and services in this ever growing region.

1.2 Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to guide the physical development of Stafford County. The Comprehensive Plan:

- Documents local characteristics and trends regarding resident population composition, land use, the natural environment, economic development and service provision;
- Provides a benchmark for evaluating the compatibility of individual development proposals with the long range development objectives of the community;
- Identifies future service needs;
- Serves as a comprehensive source of information that can be used to secure state and federal funding and market the area to potential developers;
- Promotes open space conservation designed to preserve the rural heritage of the community and enhance the overall quality of life;
- Attracts appropriate development to the County through the identification of community goals and objectives for the next 20 years;
- Lays the foundation for future cooperative efforts between the County and its neighbors

An important function of the Comprehensive Plan is to provide a framework for assessing development proposals that come before the County. The Comprehensive Plan is a lens through which development proposals should be evaluated. Each proposal should answer the question: Will this development further the vision of the future as articulated in the Comprehensive Plan? If the proposal is not consistent with the Plan, either the proposal should be rejected or revised to accurately reflect the vision of the future.

1.3 Format of the Plan

After this Introduction, the plan begins with Goals and Objectives, Policies, and Implementation Tools. Following those are the main Land Use and Public Facility Needs, and lastly, the existing conditions and public input that support the Plan. The interrelationship between these elements of the Plan are further explained:

Goals and Objectives – identify a desired future condition for various elements of growth such as land use or transportation. Goals and Objectives are the lens through which the future of Stafford is imagined.

Policies – provide guidance to the County leaders as it makes decisions. The policies serve as the filter through which the future of the built environment is directed and through which new development proposals and new directions are evaluated.

Implementation Tools – identify the specific actions that should be taken by the County to follow specified policies. An Implementation Matrix is included to prioritize tasks and identify responsible agencies.

Land Use Policies and Map – are included with this document to provide a recommended foundation for future land use decisions.

Transportation Plan – is included to identify funded transportation improvements, planned network improvements for next 20 years and anticipated road improvements that may exceed the 20 year planning horizon based on build-out of the planned land uses.

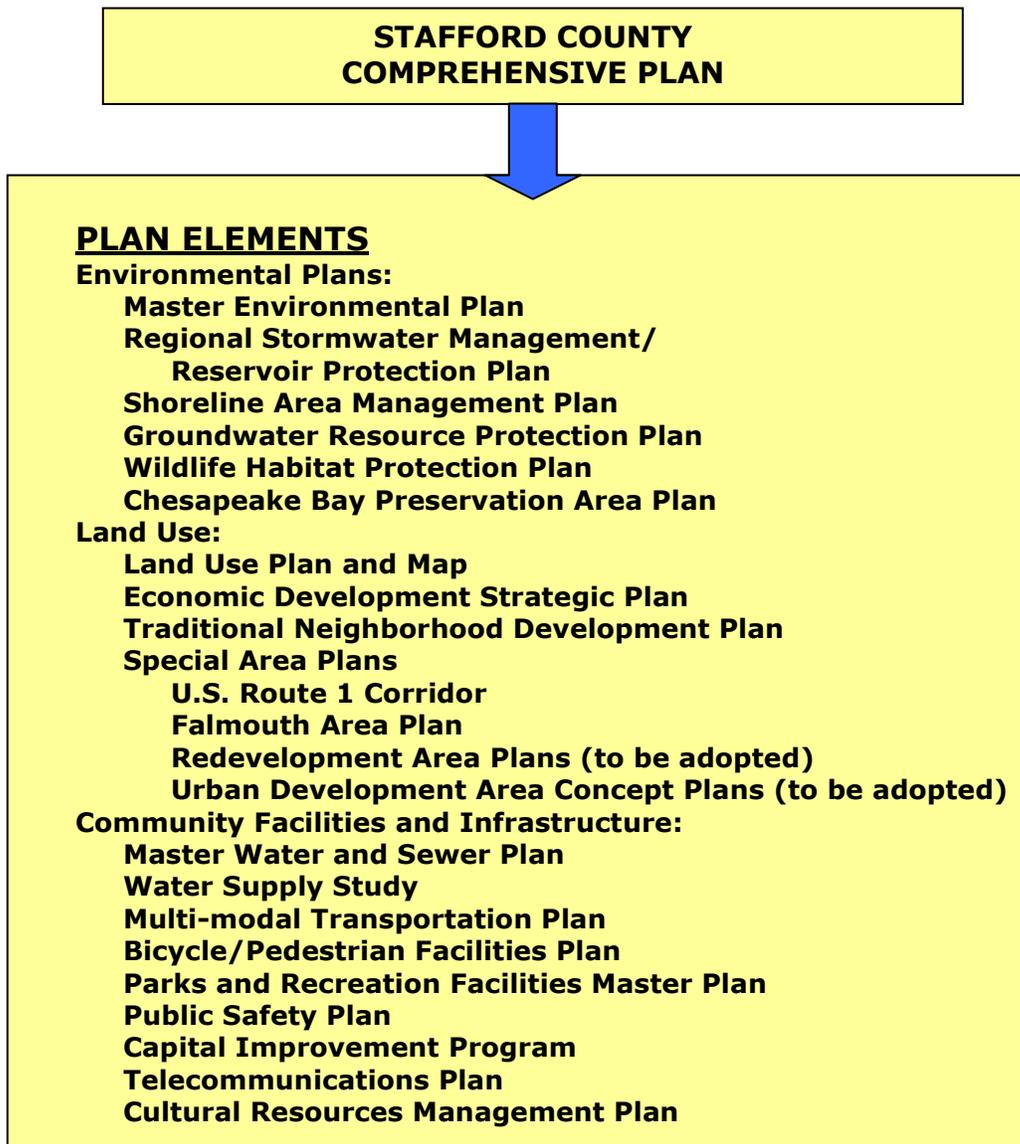
Public Facility Projections – are estimated based on the anticipated growth over the next 20 years. These facilities include schools, fire and rescue stations, parks, libraries, and government facilities.

Background Data – is provided that identifies the existing conditions and public input provided in developing this Plan. This Background Data provides a basis for the future direction envisioned in this Plan.

1.4 Relationship to other Plan Elements

The Comprehensive Plan is the main document that guides land use policy in the County. It provides the framework for public policy and land use decisions.

Plan elements provide more detailed strategies regarding specific components of land use planning, consistent with the guidance provided in the Comprehensive Plan. These Plan elements are appended to the Comprehensive Plan by reference, and upon review by the Planning Commission and adoption by the Board of Supervisors, are a part of the Comprehensive Plan. These documents may have different planning horizons, or have a purview significant enough that they require a stand-alone plan. Together, these plans are the components of the Comprehensive Plan.



1.5 Legal Basis for the Plan

The Code of Virginia requires each jurisdiction to adopt a Comprehensive Plan for its physical development. The Plan shall be prepared by the Planning Commission and adopted by the Board of Supervisors. The purpose of the Plan is to guide and accomplish 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, including the elderly and persons with disabilities.

The Code of Virginia includes specific expectations of a locality's Comprehensive Plan. It identifies what shall be required and may be included:

"The comprehensive plan shall be general in nature, in that it shall designate the General or approximate location, character, or extent of each feature, including any road improvement and any transportation improvement, shown on the plan and shall indicate where existing lands or facilities are proposed to be extended, widened, removed, relocated, vacated, narrowed, abandoned, or changed as the use may be.

As part of the Comprehensive Plan, each locality shall develop a transportation plan that designates a system of transportation infrastructure needs and recommendations that may include the designation of new and expanded transportation facilities and that support the planned development of the territory covered by the plan and shall include, as appropriate but not be limited to, roadways, bicycle accommodations, pedestrian accommodations, railways, bridges, waterways, airports, ports, and public transportation facilities. The plan should recognize and differentiate among a hierarchy of roads such as expressways, arterials, and collectors. The Virginia Department of Transportation shall, upon request, provide localities with technical assistance in preparing such transportation plan.

The plan, with the accompanying maps, plats, charts, and descriptive matter, shall show the locality's long-range recommendations for the general development of the territory covered by the plan. It may include, but need not be limited to:

1. The designation of areas for various types of public and private development and use, such as different kinds of residential, including age-restricted, housing; business; industrial; agricultural; mineral resources; conservation; active and passive recreation; public service; flood plain and drainage; and other areas;
2. The designation of a system of community service facilities such as parks, sports playing fields, forests, schools, playgrounds, public buildings and institutions, hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, community centers, waterworks, sewage disposal or waste disposal areas, and the like;
3. The designation of historical areas and areas for urban renewal or other treatment;
4. The designation of areas for the implementation of reasonable ground water protection measures;
5. A capital improvements program, a subdivision ordinance, a zoning ordinance and zoning district maps, mineral resource district maps and agricultural and forestal district maps, where applicable;

6. The location of existing or proposed recycling centers;
7. The location of military bases, military installations, and military airports and their adjacent safety areas; and
8. The designation of corridors or routes for electric transmission lines of 150 kilovolts or more.

The plan shall include: the designation of areas and implementation of measures for the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of affordable housing, which is sufficient to meet the current and future needs of residents of all levels of income in the locality while considering the current and future needs of the planning district within which the locality is situated.

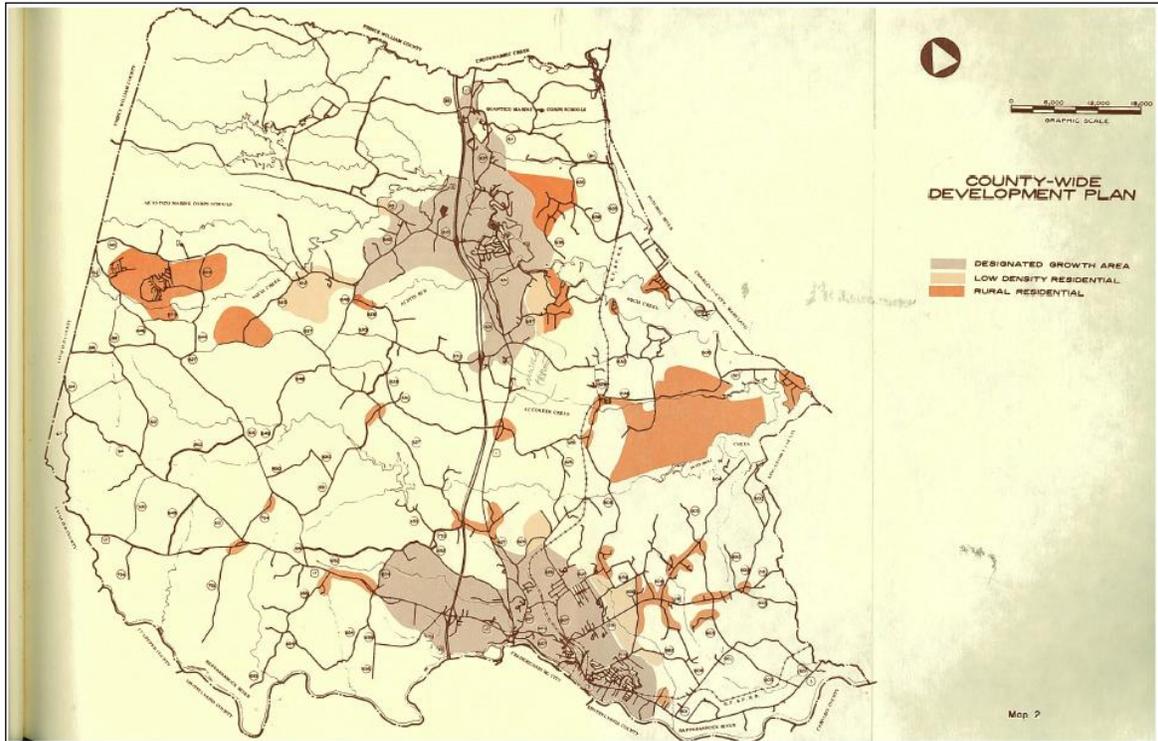
The plan shall include: a map that shall show road improvements and transportation improvements, including the cost estimates of such road and transportation improvements as available from the Virginia Department of Transportation, taking into account the current and future needs of residents in the locality while considering the current and future needs of the planning district within which the locality is situated.” (Va Code 15.2-2223)

1.6 History of the Comprehensive Plan in Stafford County

During the 1960’s and early 1970’s, Stafford County’s in-house planning function was primarily regulatory, involving administration of the subdivision and zoning ordinances. Comprehensive planning efforts were, for the most part, made possible through the assistance of State and regional agencies. The Governor’s Office, Division of Industrial Development and Planning, assisted the Stafford County Planning Commission in compiling eight reports studying the County’s existing natural resources, land uses, public facilities, and trends in population, employment, income, and industry and trade. These reports culminated in the *Future Land Use Plan (Report No. 9)* and the *Major Streets and Highways Plan (Report No. 10)*. These plans, including maps and descriptive matter (the preceding eight reports), were adopted by the Stafford County Board of Supervisors on July 8, 1964, as Stafford County’s first master plan.

Comprehensive planning efforts continued into the early 1970’s primarily through the assistance of the Rappahannock Area Development Commission (RADCO), now referred to as George Washington Regional Commission (GWRC). In 1973, increases in staff permitted a greater focus on long-range planning issues. Further impetus to bolster comprehensive planning efforts resulted from growth pressures during the 1970’s, as well as changes in planning legislation made by the 1975 Virginia General Assembly. The 1975 General Assembly amended the law to require all Virginia local governments to adopt comprehensive plans by July 1, 1980. As a result of these combined

factors, the Stafford County Board of Supervisors adopted a new comprehensive plan, the *Comprehensive Development Plan*, on April 17, 1975. This Plan was amended in June 1979, and July 1980. In February 1986, the Central Stafford U.S. Route 1 Corridor Development Plan was added.



The Comprehensive Development Plan - 1979

In May 1986, the County began the process of developing a new Land Use Plan which would represent the first in a series of component documents that now comprise the Stafford County Comprehensive Plan. The Land Use Plan was to direct residential, commercial, and industrial growth in suitable areas. This process was initiated with the development of extensive environmental, land use, and historic inventories, which would be used as a foundation in determining appropriate land uses. The location of major transportation routes, existing public utilities, and existing public facilities was also considered. The intention was to identify areas for growth that limited impacts on environmental and historic resources and took advantage of major existing roads and public utilities, while ensuring that new development was able to utilize existing park, school, library, and fire/rescue facilities effectively.

These efforts culminated in the adoption of a new County Land Use Plan as the first component of the County's Comprehensive Plan, in July 1988. This Land Use Plan provided a basis for the development of numerous Comprehensive Plan components and planning documents. These plans identify the various needs for the County relative to parks, schools, utilities, public safety, and

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transportation, while also identifying a course for development of plans to protect sensitive environmental resources. The Land Use Plan was now being used to determine the needs of the County in several important areas. Water and sewer lines were sized to accommodate future land uses in the Plan, road improvements were directly related to the Plan, as were the potential needs of the County for parks, schools, fire/rescue, libraries, and other services. The Land Use Plan was revised several times since its adoption, most recently in 1996 and 2003.

The many different elements of the Comprehensive Plan have been adopted at different times and have not been reevaluated and updated on a synchronized schedule. Several documents have not been updated since their initial adoption while others have been updated on a more regular basis.

The effort to prepare this update of the Comprehensive Plan began in April 2006. This document serves the purpose of creating a unifying document whereby other elements will be referenced and subsequently adopted or amended.

1.7 Preparation of the Plan

The Plan represents the collaborative effort of County officials and citizens and of a Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee. It is a collection of policies prepared to guide the County over the next 20 years. This section outlines the tasks completed in preparation of the Comprehensive Plan.

Steering Committee Meetings

In 2006 and 2007, a series of meetings were held with an ad-hoc Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee. The Committee consisted of appointed and elected local officials, citizens and developers. The Committee met periodically with a hired consultant to discuss and direct the preparation of the Plan. The Committee reviewed extensive documentation and mapping resources, provided contacts and helped determine representatives to participate in a series of focus group sessions. There was a visioning session held with the Committee to develop initial goals and objectives and to help define the future of Stafford County. Visioning sessions held with the Steering Committee, staff and Planning Commission are summarized in the final chapter of this plan document.

In 2008 and in 2010, two separate sub-committees of the Planning Commission met to complete the draft of the Comprehensive Plan. Revisions to the draft were considered and made with the input and guidance provided by members of the governing Board of Supervisors. Revisions also took into

account other changes in the operating environment and state legislation that took place earlier in the planning process.

Inventory

A data collection process was completed for the Plan. The information contained in the Plan was supplemented by data from various governmental and private agencies to help ensure the accuracy of the document. With the help of the various agencies, information was obtained regarding local laws and ordinances, land use, the environment, population, community services, housing, municipal services and economic development. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data was provided by Stafford County to create maps and illustrate land uses, environmental conditions and the location of community services and transportation corridors.

Focus Group Sessions & Interviews

A series of telephone interviews was conducted to obtain additional information. Many public and private sector individuals and organizations contributed data and assisted in efforts to update previous Plan elements.

Focus Group sessions were held with stakeholders on: Economic Development and Housing; Environment Parks and Nature; and Transportation and Community Services. Visioning sessions were also conducted with the Planning Commission and staff and department directors. The focus group sessions are summarized in the final chapter of this Plan document.

Public Meetings/Hearings

Interactive public meetings were conducted. The public was invited to hear about the proposed Plan and provide comments. The public meetings were held during late spring and fall of 2006 and early in 2007. These sessions helped provide the County's outside consultant and the Steering Committee with valuable feedback regarding the Plan and the future of Stafford County. These sessions are summarized in the final chapter of this Plan document.

Community Survey

A random survey was distributed to both homeowners and renters in the County. The survey was designed to determine the opinions of residents on a variety of topics, including community image, recreation, transportation, housing and community services. The survey is summarized in the final chapter of this Plan document.

Implementation

Goals, policies and actions were developed for Stafford County to guide decisions over the next 20 years. The goals, policies and actions were

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developed based in large part upon the visioning sessions, the results of the community survey, and public and other community input. These goals, objectives and policies are intended to lead to the overall improvement of Stafford County and a better quality of life for all County residents.

Revisions to the Plan

The Plan should be evaluated on an on-going basis to ensure it meets current and changing expectations. This introduces flexibility through time to evaluate changes that are unanticipated by the Plan. When the Planning Commission and/or the Board of Supervisors identify a need to amend the Comprehensive Plan, such amendments should be based on a general County need, not specific development proposals.

The entire Comprehensive Plan should be revisited and updated every five years. These revisions should reflect changes in the economic, demographic and other aspects of the community and should incorporate changing goals, objectives and policies. The five-year review is the time to accommodate changes in philosophy or direction.

1.8 Use of the Plan

This Plan will serve as a resource for those who seek general information as to how the County envisions change over the next 20 years. Crafting the Comprehensive Plan indicates a commitment to a vision for the future. As the County's primary planning document, it is of interest to elected officials, County staff, as well as the public.

Elected Officials will use the Plan to learn about their constituency's vision of the community's future as they consider development proposals and adopt local codes and ordinances to support the desired goals.

Planning Commissioners can measure the desirability of proposed developments by their conformity with the Plan; use the Plan to identify areas in which to initiate changes to subdivision and zoning ordinances; and guide its recommendations regarding transportation planning and capital improvements.

County employees will use the Plan when evaluating development proposals and prioritizing work efforts.

The Public will use the Plan as a reference when making residential location choices, determining where to locate a business, and evaluating the effectiveness of local government.

