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**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
BUSINESS MEETING
ACTION ITEM**

SUBJECT: **TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE COMMITTEE
REPORT: Initiation of the New Comprehensive Plan**

ELECTION DISTRICT: Countywide

CRITICAL ACTION DATE: At the pleasure of the Board

STAFF CONTACTS: Christopher J. Garcia, AICP, Program Manager, Planning and Zoning
Ricky W. Barker, AICP, Director, Planning & Zoning

PURPOSE: This item includes an overview of broad comprehensive planning topics; an overview of the County’s Comprehensive Plan; a review of the Plan Charter components; and justification and need for initiation of Loudoun County’s New Comprehensive Plan effort.

RECOMMENDATION:

Transportation and Land Use Committee: On February 12, 2016, the Transportation and Land Use Committee (TLUC) recommended (5-0) that the Board of Supervisors (Board) initiate the New Comprehensive Plan process and that the Board direct TLUC to work with staff to develop a Plan Charter to serve as a roadmap for developing a New Comprehensive Plan for Loudoun County.

Staff: Staff concurs with the recommendation of the TLUC.

BACKGROUND: The Comprehensive Plan is the community-based vision for Loudoun County’s future and is the land use policy document adopted by the Board. Plan policies guide the Board’s land use development decisions and are the foundation for service plans, economic development, and other strategies; and for regulatory tools such as the Zoning and Subdivision ordinances. The Code of Virginia §15.2-2223 specifies that a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the territory within locality’s jurisdiction be provided and that every governing body shall adopt a comprehensive plan for the territory under its jurisdiction within the Commonwealth.

The comprehensive plan is designed to guide the future actions of a community. It presents a vision for the future, with long-range goals and objectives for all activities that affect the local

government. This includes guidance on how to make decisions on public and private land development proposals, the expenditure of public funds, and how to address pressing issues such as farmland preservation or the redevelopment of older areas. Most plans are written to provide direction over a 10- to 20-year period after plan adoption. However, plans should receive a considered review and possible update every five years.

Staff has developed the following planning basics (Comprehensive Plan: What, Why, and How) to provide a better understanding of what a comprehensive plan is, why it is needed, and how it is used. This section also explains the difference between a comprehensive plan and the zoning ordinance.

Comprehensive Plan; What, Why, and How

What is a comprehensive plan?

The Comprehensive Plan is the community-based vision for Loudoun's future and the land use policy document adopted by the Board of Supervisors. Plan policies guide the Board of Supervisor's (Board) land use development decisions and are the foundation for service plans, economic development, and other strategies, and for regulatory implementation tools such as the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Ordinance.

A tool for **planning** the future growth, change or decline of a community, a comprehensive plan may vary in size or scale. A **comprehensive plan** can be used to address the constant change and evolution of a community and as a **guide for decision-making** to facilitate or support that change and create a sense of place.

The Comprehensive Plan is designed to guide the future actions of a community. The Plan provides guidance and policy on how to make decisions on public and private land development proposals, the expenditure of public funds, and how to address pressing issues such as farmland preservation or the redevelopment of older areas. Most plans are written to provide direction over a 10- to 20-year period after plan adoption. However, plans should receive a considered review and possible update every five years.

Why Have A Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan serves a variety of functions. These functions are aptly described by Gary D. Taylor of Iowa State University as follows:

- **The plan provides continuity.** The plan provides continuity across time, and gives successive governing bodies a common framework for addressing land-use issues.
- **It is the means by which a community can balance competing private interests.** John Public may want to store oil drums on his property. Jane Citizen, his neighbor, would like to open a restaurant on her property. Planning seeks to strike a balance among the many competing demands on land by creating development patterns that are orderly and rational, provide the

greatest benefits for individuals and the community as a whole and avoid nuisance conflicts between land uses.

- **It is the means by which a community can protect public investments.** Planning is the means by which a community avoids digging up last year's new road to lay this year's new sewer pipe. Well-planned, orderly and phased development patterns are also less expensive for a community to provide with public services than low-density, scattered development.
- **It allows communities to plan development in a way that protects valued resources.** Planning can identify environmental features like wetlands, agricultural lands, woods and steep slopes and suggest strategies for preserving those resources from destruction or degradation by inappropriate development.
- **It provides guidance for shaping the appearance of the community.** A plan can set forth policies that foster a distinctive sense of place.
- **It promotes economic development.** The plan contains valuable information that drives the location decisions of prospective firms.
- **It provides justification for decisions.** Plans provide a factual and objective basis to support zoning decisions and can be used by communities to defend their decisions if challenged in court.
- **Through public dialogue, citizens express a collective vision for the future.** Last, but certainly not least, the planning process provides citizens an opportunity to brainstorm, debate and discuss the future of their community. A plan developed through a robust public input process enjoys strong community support. Subsequent decisions that are consistent with the plan's policies are less likely to become embroiled in public controversy.

What are the required components of a comprehensive plan?

Per Section § 15.2-2223 of the Code of Virginia, 'the comprehensive plan shall be made with the purpose of guiding and accomplishing 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' and may be composed of, but is not limited to:

- designation of land areas for various types of public and private development and uses
- transportation plan that designates a system of transportation infrastructure needs and recommendations
- designation of areas for ground water protection measures
- designation of historical areas
- designation of areas of urban renewal or other treatment
- designation of areas and implementation of measures for construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of affordable housing
- 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
- designation of a system of community service facilities:
 - 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

What are the components of Loudoun County's Comprehensive Plan?

The County's Comprehensive Plan consists of the following components that may require new component documents be developed or existing documents updated/revised at the Board of Supervisors' direction:

1. General Plan ("Plan") and Amendments,
2. Revised Countywide Transportation Plan (CTP)
3. Loudoun County Bicycle and Pedestrian Mobility Master Plan
4. Strategic Plans:
 - a. Strategic Land Use Plan for Telecommunications Facilities
 - b. Countywide Retail Policy Plan Amendment
 - c. Loudoun County Heritage Preservation Plan
 - d. Greenways and Trails Policies
5. Small Area Plans/ Studies
 - a. Route 50 Keynote Employment Policies
 - b. Route 28 Keynote Employment Policies
 - c. Ashburn Community Outreach
 - d. Dulles Community Outreach
 - e. Potomac/Sterling Community Outreach
6. Area Management Plans

Generally, writing new versions of Loudoun County's General Plan with Amendments and Revised Countywide Transportation Plan will be the focus of effort for this long term planning project.

How are the policies of the Comprehensive Plan implemented?

As discussed, the Comprehensive Plan provides guidance and policy for the County and is implemented through zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, legislative processes for land development, construction permitting and the physical act of constructing facilities and infrastructure (see below).



Land Use versus Zoning

A land use plan, with categorical descriptions, is generally provided within a comprehensive plan as a **guide for decision-making** regarding use of land within a territory or jurisdiction. Most plans contain a document that sets for goals, objectives and policies and a map which illustrates the desired land uses and densities for all properties within the county. The land use plan map generally categorizes land uses with potential variations of each category based on the density or intensity of the uses and patterns of development deemed appropriate, such as:

- Residential
- Commercial/Retail
- Office
- Industrial
- Parks and Open Space
- Agricultural
- Institutional

Zoning Ordinance

The general purpose of the zoning ordinance is to promote the health, safety and welfare of the general public and accomplish ten primary objectives ranging from creating harmonious communities, to facilitating provision of adequate public facilities and services, to protection of natural and cultural resources.

The Code of Virginia describes zoning generally in § 15.2-2280. Any locality may, by ordinance, classify the territory under its jurisdiction or any substantial portion thereof into districts of such number, shape and size as it may deem best suited to carry out the purposes of promoting the health, safety and welfare of the general public. In each (zoning) district the locality may regulate, restrict, permit, prohibit, and determine the following:

- The use of land, buildings, structures and other premises for agricultural, business, industrial, residential, flood plain and other specific uses;
- The size, height, area, bulk, location, erection, construction, reconstruction, alteration, repair, maintenance, razing, or removal of structures;
- The areas and dimensions of land, water, and air space to be occupied by buildings, structures and uses, and of courts, yards, and other open spaces to be left unoccupied by uses and structures,

including variations in the sizes of lots based on whether a public or community water supply or sewer system is available and used; or

- The excavation or mining of soil or other natural resources.

Zoning is very different from comprehensive plans and land use plans, in that zoning provides prescriptive standards and requirements for development in order to achieve the broad planning policies and guidance articulated in comprehensive plan components.

Unlike a land use plan, which contains broad policies, a zoning ordinance contains codified requirements and criteria for the use of land. A zoning ordinance also contains a map which typically designated each property a certain zoning district. Each district contains certain uses that are permitted or permitted only by special exception.

Current Comprehensive Plan

Loudoun's current comprehensive plan is called the Revised Plan. The Revised Plan process was conducted during 2000 and 2001 and is the product of citizens, the Planning Commission, the Board of Supervisors, County staff and consultants. The *General Plan* and the *County-wide Transportation Plan* were reviewed concurrently by the Planning Commission over two months. The Commission identified concerns in addition to those initially raised by the Board of Supervisors and also received public input in several forums. The Revised Comprehensive Plan was adopted on July 23, 2001 with 26 Comprehensive Plan Amendments (CPAM) approved as of December 11, 2013.

The goals of the Plan generally include promoting reasonable residential growth, providing opportunities for economic development alleviating future traffic congestion, promoting a diverse economy, protecting the rural economy and environment, and preserving environmental, cultural and historical features.

While a number of significant amendments have occurred, comprehensive and holistic analysis and revision of the Comprehensive Plan components have not been completed on a regular interval to maintain plan currency with growth and development on the ground. The County's Comprehensive Plan has been very successful in accomplishing the community's vision, achieving a robust economy, and producing one of the most desirable places to live, work, and play in the county over the years. However, conditions in the county have significantly changed since the last major comprehensive planning effort and the time has come for Loudoun County to develop a new plan to account for existing conditions and new projections in growth countywide.

New Comprehensive Plan Charter

Staff believes that the first step to begin a new comprehensive plan is for the Board approval of a "plan on how to do the plan" or a Plan Charter. The New Comprehensive Plan Charter will include a preliminary list of the main topics the Plan should address, a description of the planning process and schedule, the organizational structure or the roles and responsibilities of the major groups involved in the process (e.g., Board, Staff, Planning Commission, community stakeholders task force, etc.), a description of the community outreach and engagement strategy,

and the role of consultants. New Comprehensive Plan Charter section below provides a more detailed description of a Charter and its components.

What is a plan charter and its purpose?

The recommended first step in this initiation is to establish a “plan on how to do the plan” or a Plan Charter. The New Comprehensive Plan Charter will include pertinent background information and broad existing conditions, a preliminary list of the prominent issues the Plan should address, a description of the planning process and schedule, the organizational structure, a description of the community outreach and engagement strategy, and the role of consultants. The overarching purpose of the Plan Charter is to provide a road map for success in completing this monumental task for Loudoun County.

The plan charter will generally consist of sections describing the above items:

- **An Introduction:** provides a broad overview of the planning project to include the key objectives, current planning issues, project requirements (i.e. local and state code requirements) and introduces current geography, demographics and environments, general growth trends and projections and current status of the existing Comprehensive Plan components.
- **Planning Topics To Be Addressed:** provides a description of key planning topics to be addressed in the plan based on Board direction.
- **Organizational Structure:** identifies the major groups involved in the process and their roles and responsibilities of the major groups involved in process (e.g., Board, Staff, Planning Commission, community stakeholders, etc.)
- **Planning Process:** provides more detail in the project phasing, project schedule and specific planning activities for the project
- **Community Outreach and Engagement** – sets forth the amount and quality of community involvement. Outreach can vary from limited to a very in-depth level.
- **Resources and Support Required:** further defines resources being allocated by the County for the project, County Staff participation and coordination needed, outside agency coordination and collaboration needed and technical consultant support needs

What are some key discussion and decision points for TLUC and the Board of Supervisors for the Plan Charter?

Planning Topics to be Addressed

The Board should establish the key planning topics that will need to be addressed with the new Comprehensive Plan. In general, the plan will cover transportation networks, land use policy and a land use plan. The Board should identify specific topics that have represented major land use challenges over the years that must be addressed like development within the Transition Policy Area, and the Keynote Employment Policy.

Additional planning topics are likely to be determined through direction of the Board and community input with the potential to impact scope and schedule of this project. Careful consideration and clear understanding of the issues will be critical to producing a Plan Charter detailing the requirements for a comprehensive planning document that addresses needs for the community for the future.

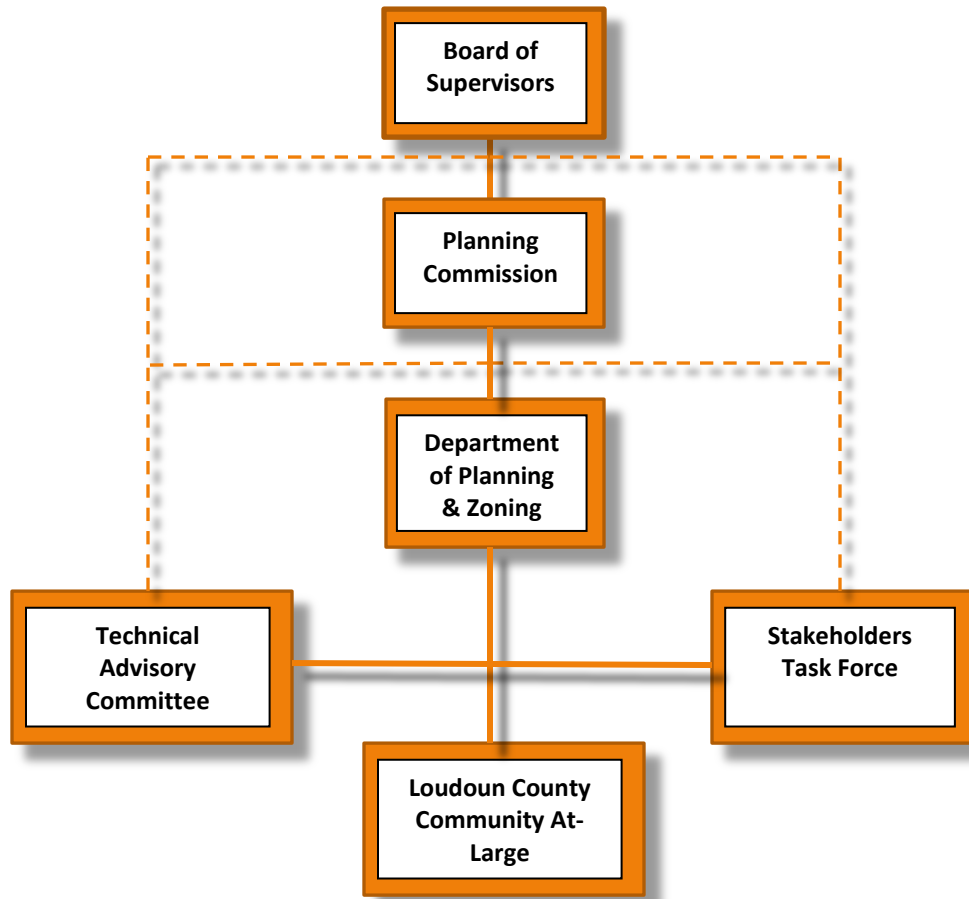
Organizational Structure

A primary component for successfully developing a new comprehensive plan is to determine roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders: Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, County staff, and the Loudoun County community at-large. The Board of Supervisors will be the primary leader and decision maker throughout the process. Due to the many responsibilities of the Board, larger projects such as the development of a draft of a new comprehensive plan is delegated to others.

During the last Comprehensive Plan effort, the Planning Commission was generally charged with developing the plan. The Planning Commission conducted over 17 hours of public hearings on the November 14th draft of the Revised General Plan and Revised Countywide Transportation Plan on December 12th and 16th, 2000. With consideration of the public's input and additional review of background data and information, the Planning Commission met weekly from January through April 2001 to hone and refine the Plan policies. A final Planning Commission draft of the Revised General Plan and Revised Countywide Transportation Plan, incorporating changes from these deliberations, was prepared and approved by the Planning Commission on May 1, 2001. A resolution certifying this Planning Commission approved draft was sent forward to the Board of Supervisors on May 1, 2001. The Board of Supervisors concluded the process with adoption on July 23, 2001.

An alternative organizational structure may include formation of a Stakeholders Task Force, consisting of selected community stakeholder representing a broad range of citizens, community groups and interests, to work collaboratively with the County Staff to develop the plan, plan policies and technical products.

Although Department of Planning and Zoning Staff will play a key role with facilitating the new comprehensive plan effort, most all County Departments and Agencies will need to be active participants in this impactful project. A Technical Advisory Committee consisting of key County staff and outside agency representatives could be formed to provide technical guidance on various topical issues. This collaborative organizational structure would then forward the plan and its components to the Planning Commission for its recommendation and to the Board of Supervisors for adoption. This potential organizational structure may look like:



Comprehensive Plan Process (Tasking, Phasing and Timeline)

Determining an appropriate planning process based on current planning practices, past experiences, community dynamics and available time and resources will be critical to a successful project. For example, a four-phased process with the three main immediate phases being: 1) Project Planning and Initiation; 2) Plan Development; and 3) Plan Recommendation/Adoption is one possible solution for the Plan Charter. The time it takes to complete this process will depend upon the scope of the project. If the scope focuses on addressing the key topics plus an in-depth community engagement component, staff estimates that this process could take 18 months. The fourth phase consists generally of Plan Implementation after the new comprehensive plan adoption. This phase could include a new zoning ordinance and/or small areas plans.

Community Outreach and Engagement Options

In order to achieve successful outcomes, open and accessible planning activities throughout the county should be undertaken to maximize public participation and gain consensus on various

issues and components of the New Comprehensive Plan. While more costly and time consuming, an In-Depth Strategy offers a full range of opportunities for public participation and requires more active outreach efforts to improve the acceptance of the plan components as it moves through the planning process. Conversely, the lower cost options puts public consensus and acceptance of a plan at risk and is generally less favorable to positive outcomes that results in addressing the community needs and current planning practices.

- In-Depth Community Outreach and Engagement Strategy: With this approach, the community will be engaged with a multi-pronged approach to illicit feedback on community issues, plan goals, objectives and strategies using multiple in-person Community Conversations throughout the County and social media outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, and County Planning and Zoning webpages dedicated to this process. This strategy would employ traditional planning techniques with multiple community meetings and work sessions throughout the County to engage in issue identification, goals and objectives writing and policy development as well as engage web-based forums in a limited fashion.
- Hybrid Community Outreach and Engagement Strategy: A moderated community engagement process would include surveys (resident and business), youth and senior focus groups, electronic outreach in the form of web-based forums and crowdsourced mapping, and community work sessions which would provide stakeholders with numerous avenues through which they expressed their desires for the community. This multifaceted approach could be designed to meet interested residents, business owners, and employees where it was convenient for them.
- Limited Community Outreach and Engagement Strategy: the community will be engaged in a very limited fashion through provision of opportunities to provide feedback on a drafted Comprehensive Plan which may be refined prior to Plan Recommendation at Planning Commission and Adoption by the Board of Supervisors.

Resources Supporting the Planning Process and County Staff

Resources such as outside technical consultants, outside agency coordination and interdepartmental coordination will be essential to a success project as suggested partially in the example Organizational Structure. While the majority of the technical and logistical capabilities currently existing within the County Government organizational structure, some additional expertise and support will likely be required due to the large scale of this planning project. Some considerations for the Plan Charter and the Board of Supervisors decision-making may include:

- Community Outreach / Public Engagement Consultant: with an In-Depth Community Outreach and Engagement Option, a consultant will likely be needed to assist with plan marketing, public communication, developing multi-media input/feedback platforms and input/feedback data management and compilation

- Transportation Planning Consultant: updates of the Countywide Transportation Plan in conjunction with the Staff-led General Plan development will require support from a transportation consultant given current staff workloads and the magnitude of the planning project.

Staff is recommending the initiation of a new comprehensive plan and direct creation of a comprehensive plan amendment number to associate with this project at this time. This new plan will build on what is still relevant and important to carry forward within the current Revised General Plan and the Countywide Transportation Plan while providing a new vision to guide the County into the future.

On February 12, 2016, the TLUC received a presentation from Planning and Zoning Staff to introduce the topic of comprehensive planning, specific planning topics related to comprehensive plans and to recommend initiation of a New Comprehensive Plan for Loudoun County. The TLUC discussed staff's recommended decision points related to community outreach and public engagement, planning topics to be addressed by the New Comprehensive Plan, and stakeholder involvement. The TLUC expressed the importance of providing adequate public participation opportunities across the County based on established planning priorities and complexities for each area, and to continue to perpetuate planning policies that remain relevant to achieving the broad vision for the future of Loudoun County. The TLUC recommended (5-0) that the Board initiate the New Comprehensive Plan process and direct TLUC to work with the staff to develop a Plan Charter to serve as a roadmap for developing a New Comprehensive Plan for Loudoun County.

Provided that the Board is willing to initiate the new comprehensive plan, staff is recommending the Board direct staff to develop a draft Plan Charter and for the TLUC to review and modify the Plan Charter, if needed, at its meeting on March 11, 2016. The intent would be to complete the Plan Charter with TLUC input and direction and refer the item back to the Board for endorsement and direction to Staff to execute the Plan Charter thereafter.

FISCAL IMPACT: There is no fiscal impact associated with developing a Plan Charter. An estimate of the necessary resources and fiscal impact to complete the new comprehensive plan will be presented with the Plan Charter. As part of the FY 2017 budget process the Planning and Zoning Department has requested a \$1,000,000 enhancement to fund the process and necessary professional consultant support for a New Comprehensive Plan ([Page E-25 in the FY2017 Budget Document](#)). Additional funding for FY 2018 is planned to support the planning effort beyond this fiscal year.

ALTERNATIVES: The Board may recommend postponement of the initiation of the New Comprehensive Plan to a later date, or request additional information.

DRAFT MOTIONS:

1. I move that the Board of Supervisors initiate the process for a New Comprehensive Plan for Loudoun County and direct staff to present a Plan Charter to the Transportation and Land Use Committee for its consideration and recommendation for endorsement by the full Board of Supervisors.

OR

2. I move an alternate motion.