

Chapter 1 - Introduction

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The *Loudoun County 2019 Comprehensive Plan* (Comprehensive Plan) is the culmination of a collaborative multiyear effort and an unprecedented public outreach campaign that brought together Loudoun's citizens, elected and appointed officials, stakeholders, and County staff to create a new comprehensive plan for the County. This planning process, known as *Envision Loudoun*, identified the community's desires for the future of Loudoun County as they relate to growth management, land use, place types, transportation, natural, environmental, and heritage resources, community facilities and amenities, economic development, and fiscal management.



Vision:

Loudoun County continues to flourish as a prosperous and inclusive community with a well-deserved reputation for great places – natural and built, as well as, historic and new – in a variety of settings. The County will foster economic innovation, fiscal strength, and sustainability.

The Envision Loudoun planning process began with a Charter adopted by the Board of Supervisors in April 2016. The Charter identified key issues to be addressed in the new comprehensive plan: Growth Management, Land Use, Transportation, Natural, Environmental, and Heritage Resources, Community Facilities and Amenities, Economic Development, and Fiscal Management. The Charter called for the formation of a 26-member committee of community stakeholders, convened a staff technical advisory committee from regional public agencies, and set forth a community engagement strategy to allow for multiple opportunities for public outreach throughout the process. To ensure the community was kept informed, a communications plan was deployed that utilized internet, social media, radio advertising, and print materials.

Envision Loudoun proved to be an unprecedented public engagement effort for the County. Between summer 2016 and spring 2018, the stakeholders committee and County staff held over 40 work sessions. The public participated in three sets of public outreach sessions – totaling 17 meetings – each at various locations throughout the County. An Envision Loudoun website was established and kept up-to-date with maps, process updates, and project documents. The website also provided a web interface for citizens to provide input regarding the key issues to be addressed in the new comprehensive plan. All told, approximately 3,000 people participated in the Envision Loudoun process.

Purpose and Definition

The Comprehensive Plan includes this *Loudoun County 2019 General Plan* (General Plan) and the *Loudoun County 2019 Countywide Transportation Plan* (2019 CTP), a document developed in close coordination with this General Plan. The Comprehensive Plan is not a development ordinance, but is instead a policy document that provides guidance for elected officials and other governmental decision-makers as to where and how the community will grow in the long-term.

A comprehensive plan provides an opportunity for a community to think collectively about its future and to develop a shared set of values and strategies intended to achieve a unified vision. A comprehensive plan is a critical tool for managing growth, the provision of capital facilities, and the fiscal health of communities. It is especially important for high growth communities like Loudoun County, where change can happen quickly, and a comprehensive plan is needed to guide that change. A comprehensive plan is not a static document. In accordance with the Code of Virginia it must be reviewed at least every five years.

Loudoun County's Planning Approach

The General Plan builds upon the County's strong foundation of growth management practices. The Loudoun County Board of Supervisors adopted the County's first zoning ordinance in 1942 and its first comprehensive plan in 1959. The County's 1991 general plan, *Choices and Changes*, was written when the County was largely undeveloped with an abundance of greenfield development opportunity in the eastern part of the County. By 2001, when the *Revised General Plan* was adopted, the County was feeling the effects of a 97 percent population increase since the adoption of *Choices and Changes*.

For decades, the County has supported the protection of its rural and agricultural areas to the west and focused development in suburban areas to the east. The County has accommodated growth near existing infrastructure to support development in a fiscally sound manner, where the market forces have been strongest for new residential and employment development. Loudoun's growth management policies have resulted in some of the most highly valued residential communities in the region, while also encouraging new business development.

The framework for land planning in Loudoun County consists of four types of policy areas – Urban, Suburban, Transition, and Rural – and several smaller planning areas designated as Joint Land Management Areas (JLMA) and Rural Historic Villages. These areas represent distinct planning communities with specific policies, strategies, and actions tailored to address the needs of each area.



Loudoun Station, a mixed-use town center development adjacent to the Silver Line Ashburn Station, is within one of the new Urban Policy Areas.

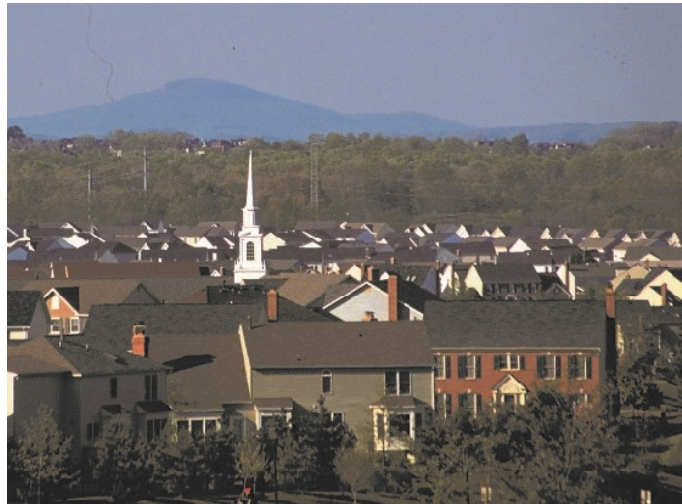
Urban Policy Areas

The Urban Policy Areas (UPA) represent a new planning area concept in Loudoun, encompassing approximately 2,600 acres in areas around the Silver Line Metrorail Stations. The two UPAs represent major growth opportunities for Loudoun with mixed-use and transit-oriented place types and development intensity not previously contemplated in the County. The Comprehensive Plan calls for complete urban communities that accommodate housing, employment, retail, education, and

entertainment in close proximity to Metrorail. These areas will facilitate opportunities for significant job creation and expansion of the County's tax base.

Suburban Policy Area

The 48,000-acre Suburban Policy Area (SPA) comprises the eastern third of the County and is where most of the residential and commercial growth has occurred since the 1960's. The SPA developed in a traditional suburban pattern with predominantly single-family neighborhoods. From 1990 to 2017, 102,905 housing units were built throughout Loudoun County and over 70 percent of those were built in the SPA. Route 28 and Loudoun County Parkway (Route 607) form the County's "data center alley," having evolved into an international leader for global data management, technology, and communications industries. More than 70 percent of all internet traffic is routed through data centers in this policy area. The area around Washington Dulles International Airport is also expected to continue to be a major factor as a key location for industrial uses, airport-related businesses, and data center development.



Much of Loudoun's residential growth has occurred in the easternmost part of the County. With decreasing undeveloped areas, the Loudoun County 2019 General Plan anticipates a more integrated mix of uses in this part of the County over the next two decades.



The Transition Policy Area is planned for a diversity of housing options in clustered patterns with substantial open space areas that provide recreational amenities and protect natural, environmental, and heritage resources.

Transition Policy Area

The Transition Policy Area (TPA) is a 24,000-acre area along the western edge of the SPA and is intended to be visually distinct from the SPA and Rural Policy Area (RPA). The area is planned for a diversity of large-lot and clustered residential uses with limited commercial uses to support residents and some industrial spaces focused on quarry activity and energy infrastructure. Public utilities are available in the TPA, though the transportation network is limited in certain places at present time. Large amounts of open space, trails, and parks provide recreational opportunities for residents of the

entire County and help to maintain a visual distinction between the more densely populated east and the rural west.

Rural Policy Area

The western 230,000-acre RPA comprises nearly two-thirds of Loudoun's land area and contains twelve Rural Historic Villages (see Chapter 2). This area is planned for limited residential development and supports a robust rural economy. The General Plan includes policies that protect the landscape, economy, and the existing community character of the RPA, emphasizing the preservation of farmland; natural, environmental, and heritage resources; open space; and vistas that are vital aspects of Loudoun's identity.



The Loudoun County 2019 General Plan recognizes the importance of protecting the pastoral landscapes and agricultural character of Loudoun's Rural Policy Area.



Loudoun County's western landscape is dotted with historic towns that serve as hubs for the rural community.

Towns and Joint Land Management Areas

Loudoun County's seven incorporated towns exercise planning and zoning controls within their corporate limits. In addition to the four policy areas, the County has partnered with several of its towns to develop JLMAs around the edges of the towns. A JLMA is a planning area where the County and each respective town set the limits for potential municipal water and sewer extension. These JLMA planning areas effectively serve as a growth boundary for each town and are intended to manage new growth and expansion outward from the towns.

Loudoun County: Trends and Influences

Loudoun County has rapidly transformed from a farming community to one of the fastest growing counties in the nation, ranking fifth in the country for growth between 2000 and 2010. This growth has slowed somewhat as developable land in the eastern part of the County has become more constrained, but the County's high quality of life, strong economy, natural and historic assets, and proximity to Washington, D.C. will continue to drive market demand. The General Plan identifies a number of trends and influences, including population diversity, housing affordability, and land availability that will affect future demand for both residential and nonresidential products.

Loudoun by the Numbers

- **406,850:** Loudoun County's population.
- **121,299:** Number of households.
- **\$129,588:** Median annual household income.
- **41.5:** Percent of households with annual income above \$150,000.
- **2.8:** Percent of households with annual income below \$15,000.
- **35.8:** Loudoun County's median age
- **28.5:** Percent of population under 18 years of age.
- **8.9:** Percent of population 65 years and older.
- **31.4:** Percent of population that speaks a language other than English at home.
- **93.5:** Percent of population 25 years and over graduated from high school.
- **59.8:** Percent of population 25 years and over with a bachelor's degree or higher.
- **32.1:** Average number of minutes it takes commuters to get to work.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2019 Quickfacts; 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

People

Loudoun County's population has risen over the decades as the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area has grown and as Loudoun County has captured more of this regional growth. In 1940, the County's population was just over 20,000 people. Fifty years later, the population had quadrupled, totaling just over 86,000 people in 1990. Since 1990, the population quadrupled again with an estimated 406,850 people in 2018.¹ However, this exponential growth is projected to slow as Loudoun continues to mature, a trend that may already be occurring. From 2000 to 2010, Loudoun was the 5th fastest growing county in the nation, but dropped to the 20th fastest growing county from 2010 to 2015. Even with this slowdown, Loudoun's population is projected to increase to almost 694,911 by 2040.²

As Loudoun's population has grown, the community has also diversified. Between 2000 and 2018, the percentage of Loudoun's population identifying as Hispanic or Latino increased from 6.0 percent to 13.9 percent. During the same time period, the percentage of people identifying as Asian grew from 5.6 percent to 19.4 percent. The percentage of residents identifying as Black or African American is also growing, though at a much slower rate, increasing from 7.0 percent to 7.9 percent.³ Overall, Loudoun's foreign-born population has increased from 11.3 percent in 2000 to 23.9 percent in 2017.⁴ This growth has led to greater diversity in service demands, expanded retail and entertainment opportunities, changes in housing needs, and overall expanded economic growth of the community.

Housing

As of 2017, Loudoun ranked number one in the country for the highest median household income for the tenth straight year, yet housing affordability and attainability remain a significant challenge in the County and the region. Limited housing supply and high demand present difficulties for employers in attracting employees and contribute to workforce instability, especially in lower paying industries.

Over 82 percent of Loudoun's existing housing stock consists of traditional suburban single-family detached and single-family attached dwellings. Most of the housing stock is also considered large, with 80 percent of all dwellings containing three or more bedrooms. Conversely, studio and one-bedroom housing make up less than six percent of all housing in the County. National trends show that smaller households, such as aging seniors, couples without children, and single persons, may demand different housing types, public services, and lifestyle options than provided in the past. There is also a general national trend toward more people living in multigenerational households, which may require different types of housing options to help accommodate the needs of multiple generations living together.

The General Plan provides a renewed opportunity for the County to adopt a policy direction that promotes an inclusive, diverse, and flexible housing environment that aligns with the community's

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program (PEP), 2018

² University of Virginia Weldon Cooper Center, Demographics Research Group. (2017). Virginia Population Projections.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program (PEP), 2018

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey

larger land use and community development goals. The General Plan anticipates that new approaches to planned land use policies will facilitate market-driven increases in the variety of housing types developed, help fulfill the demand for market rate sales and rental units, and temper rising housing costs overall. A variety of existing and planned County, state, and federal initiatives and programs will continue to provide housing options for more vulnerable population groups.

The County anticipates continued high demand for new residential units over the next several decades, which could compound challenges related to both availability and affordability. With limited land available for residential development in the SPA and the County's desire to protect the character of the RPA, the General Plan emphasizes new opportunities to create places that will meet the needs of the growing and diversifying community.

The designation of new UPAs aims to provide high quantities of new housing in active, mixed-use, transit-oriented settings proximate to the planned Silver Line Metrorail stations. The General Plan also reimagines areas of the SPA and aims to provide more housing options through new opportunities for mixed-use development, compact neighborhoods on infill parcels, and innovative approaches to redeveloping maturing neighborhood centers. The General Plan also anticipates a mix of compact single-family and semi-attached housing products (e.g., duplex, triplex, and quadruplex) in targeted parts of the TPA. This multifaceted approach is intended to promote housing availability and affordability, increase the diversity of housing choices, and create new places that meet the County's evolving needs without compromising the quality of life for which Loudoun is known.

Transit

The County's connection to the regional Metrorail network through the Silver Line extension signals a new era for Loudoun, with significant impacts on transit options available to Loudoun's residents, workers, and visitors. Two Metrorail stations in Loudoun provide a gateway to Loudoun County from Washington, D.C., while also providing Loudoun's residents with an alternative method of commuting to the east. Access to the Silver Line creates the opportunity to develop vibrant, transit-oriented, mixed-use, urban environments around the Metrorail stations, where people can live and work in close proximity to regional transit.

The Washington Dulles International Airport will also continue to serve as a major transportation gateway to the country and the world. It provides a critical economic engine for leisure and business travel as well as cargo transport for the County and the larger Washington, D.C., region. In 2017, 265,025 flights operated out of Washington Dulles International Airport, serving nearly 22,800,000 passengers, including 7,744,586 international travelers.⁵ With its close proximity to the Metrorail stations and UPAs, Washington Dulles International Airport is well positioned to grow moving into the future, operating currently at approximately one-third of its ultimate capacity.

⁵ Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority, 2018

Economy

The General Plan acknowledges that local, regional, and national economic factors have changed significantly in the last two decades and includes new policies and strategies to continue Loudoun's remarkable success as an economic leader in the region. Employment in Loudoun County increased nearly 77 percent from 2000 to 2015, adding over 67,000 new jobs in a 15-year period.⁶ Momentum in Loudoun's job base is influenced by activity in the surrounding region, proximity to Washington Dulles International Airport, a growing information and communications sector, agritourism, and a robust increase in households requiring a wide array of services.

Loudoun's economy continues to diversify and the General Plan provides growth opportunities for this evolving economy. Employment uses adjacent to the future Metrorail Stations will also present new opportunities to attract employers who seek to locate in dynamic, urban communities with access to mass transit.

Elements of the Loudoun County 2019 General Plan

The General Plan begins with an overarching vision and goals; then sets forth policies, strategies, and actions for five elements: Land Use; Natural, Environmental, and Heritage Resources; Housing; Economic Development; and Fiscal Management and Public Infrastructure. An Implementation Matrix is provided to prioritize and track the execution of the *Loudoun County 2019 Comprehensive Plan* action items. In addition to this Introduction, the General Plan includes chapters associated with each of the five elements and the Implementation matrix:

- *Land Use.* Chapter 2 lays out the vision for Loudoun's future land uses, growth management, and built environment. It includes specific policy guidance for Quality Development, Infill and Redevelopment, and each geographic policy area. Place Types guide the intent, form, character, and anticipated uses within each policy area.
- *Natural, Environmental, and Heritage Resources.* Chapter 3 provides guidance for the protection, maintenance, and enhancement of the County's abundant natural, environmental, and heritage resources. The policy approach is applicable at multiple geographic scales, from initiatives that may affect these resources countywide, to management of specific watersheds and waterways, to site-level development considerations.
- *Housing.* Chapter 4 analyzes the current and anticipated housing environment in Loudoun County and includes policies aimed at ensuring the provision of a full housing continuum for the varied lifestyles, households, ages, cultures, market preferences, incomes, and abilities of Loudoun's residents.
- *Economic Development.* Chapter 5 examines the many challenges and opportunities facing Loudoun County in maintaining and advancing the County's diverse and globally competitive economy. The policies focus on targeted industries, investments, and County initiatives that contribute to Loudoun's world-class business environment and ties in land use considerations to sustain a diverse, adaptable, and dynamic County economy.

⁶ Loudoun County Department of Economic Development, 2018

- *Fiscal Management and Public Infrastructure.* Chapter 6 acknowledges the interrelatedness of land use, growth management, fiscal management, and facilities planning. The policy approach ensures the provision of public facilities and utilities, high-quality telecommunications networks, and passive and active recreational amenities in accordance with the County’s larger planning and fiscal policies.
- *Implementation.* Chapter 7 compiles the individual Policies, Strategies, and Actions described throughout the *Loudoun County 2019 General Plan* and provides an Implementation Matrix that assigns responsibility for each action item.

In addition to the Place Types in Chapter 2, the General Plan’s guidance is established through:

- Policy statements for each element that provide the approach to decision-making for specific topics or issues;
- Strategies providing more focused, measurable guidance for decision-making relative to each policy; and
- Actions that target specific steps to realize the Policies and Strategies and intent of the General Plan.

The five elements of the General Plan are interrelated and complementary, and Policies, Strategies, and Actions from multiple elements may apply when evaluating individual proposals or initiatives. The Policies, Strategies, and Actions are organized hierarchically; however, each category carries equal weight. As such, Strategies may apply to different Policies and Actions may apply to different Strategies than those under which they are nested.

Policy and Regulatory Context

Statutory Basis for the Comprehensive Plan

The basis for the Comprehensive Plan is rooted in Chapter 22, Article 3 of Title 15.2 of Code of Virginia. The County’s Planning Commission is responsible for preparing and recommending a comprehensive plan to the Board of Supervisors, which adopts the plan. Subject to the requirements and limitations of state law, the County manages the physical development of territory within its jurisdiction in accordance with the policies of its comprehensive plan.

Relationship to Other Planning Documents

The Comprehensive Plan serves as the “umbrella” for the County’s planning efforts and consists of the General Plan and the 2019 CTP. The Comprehensive Plan supersedes the following previously adopted planning documents: the *Revised General Plan* (2001, as amended); the *Revised Countywide Transportation Plan* (2010, as amended); the *Bicycle and Pedestrian Mobility Master Plan* (2003); the *Greenways and Trails Policies* (1994); the *Toll Road Plan* (1995); the *Countywide Retail Policy Plan Amendment* (1997, as amended); the *Route 28 Keynote Employment Policies*, which includes the *Route 28 Corridor Plan* (2011); the *Arcola Area/Route 50 Corridor Plan* (2006); the *Leesburg Area Management Plan* (1982, as amended), the *Dulles North Area Management Plan* (1985, as amended), the *Dulles South Area Management Plan* (1993), the *Cub Run Area Management Plan* (1989), and the *Eastern Loudoun Area Management Plan* (1980, as amended).

The County will continue to apply the *Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Hamilton* (2003), the *Round Hill Area Management Plan* (1990, as amended), and the *Waterford Area Management Plan* (1987). The *Heritage Preservation Plan* (2003, as amended), *Route 50 Corridor Design Guidelines* (2007), and *Strategic Land Use Plan for Telecommunication Facilities* (1996) also remain in effect. The policies and guidelines in the Comprehensive Plan will supersede any conflicting policies and/or guidelines contained in any of the plans mentioned above.

The Comprehensive Plan anticipates the need for additional detailed planning efforts, such as community plans, to address the County's complex and evolving planning challenges and to better realize the County's long-range community development goals.

Relationship to Regulatory Documents

The General Plan sets forth the community-based vision for Loudoun's future and is a policy document that provides guidance to the County's decision-makers regarding land development, capital improvements, and public programs. Loudoun County's zoning ordinances are regulatory documents that establish the rules governing the use of land. The zoning ordinances specify permitted uses on properties, regulate the density and intensity of development, and establish design parameters for developments.

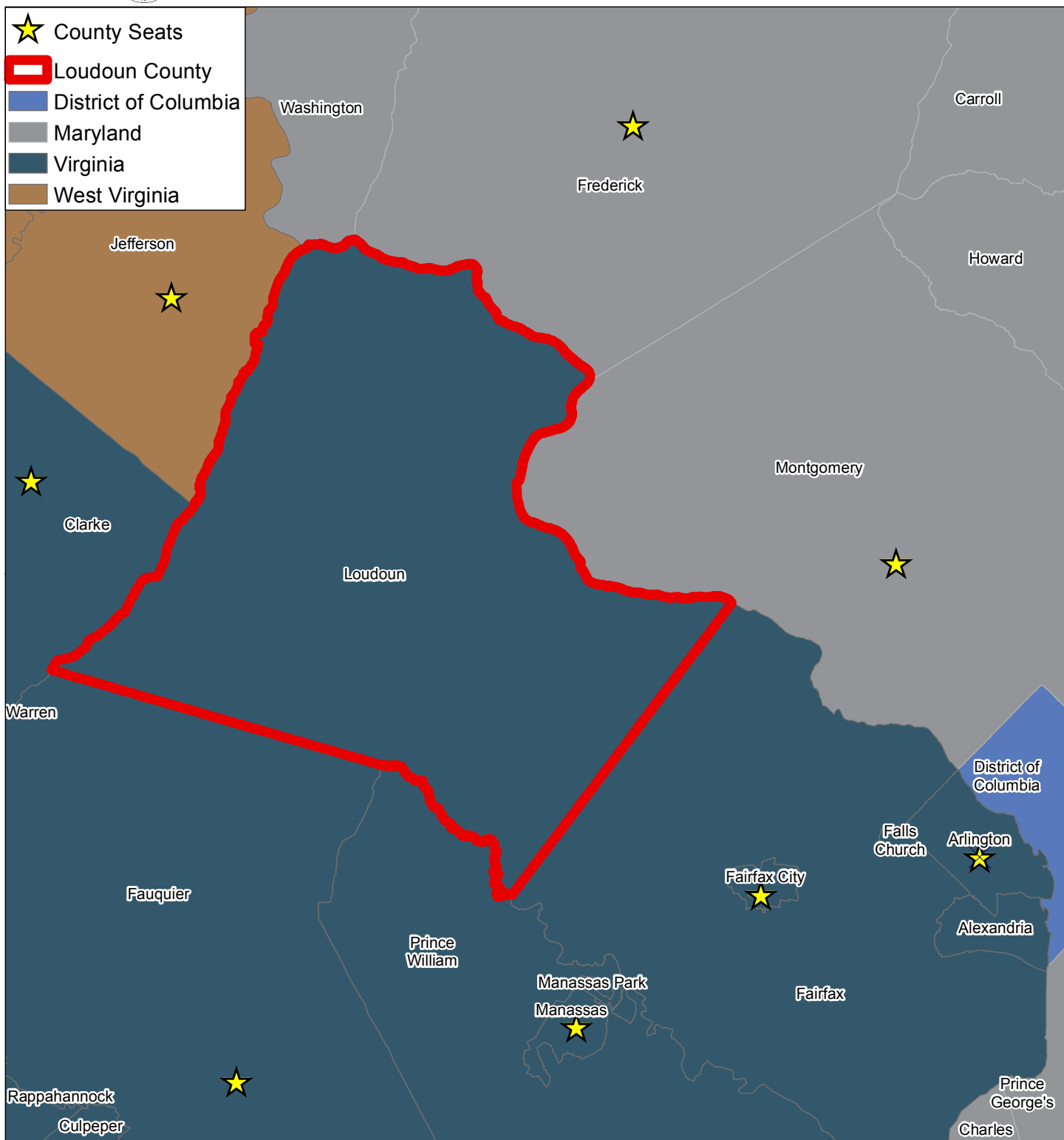
A new zoning ordinance will implement many of the Policies, Strategies, and Actions described in the General Plan. Parts of the General Plan also refer to other documents that regulate land development, including the *Loudoun County Facilities Standards Manual* and the *Loudoun County Land Subdivision and Development Ordinance*. Although the Comprehensive Plan provides guidance for potential revisions and amendments to various regulations, it does not replace or supersede the County's existing codes and ordinances, all of which remain in effect.

For the purpose of staff review of legislative applications, Policies, Strategies, and Actions that propose the development of new regulations, amendments to existing regulations, or the creation of new regulatory incentives will be treated as Comprehensive Plan policy guidance until implemented.

Reference Maps

Loudoun County and Surrounding Area (Map #2018-153)

Loudoun County
**Loudoun County and
 Surrounding Area**
 2019 General Plan



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