# DESIRED FUTURE STATE – 2040
# HEALTHY GROWTH

## Potential Growth Management Strategies

**CONTEXT:**

On November 7, 2018 the Board of Supervisors adopted a new vision statement and strategic plan for the County. The vision statement was entitled "Stafford County – 2040 – Where heart, home and a healthy business environment come together in one community". To implement the vision, seven strategic priorities were developed to be implemented within the next three years. One of those areas of focus was to address "Healthy Growth". Priority 1.1 is to "Identify and execute growth management strategies that align our Comprehensive Plan and infrastructure (i.e., roads, broadband, schools, water and sewer) without negatively impacting taxation. Strategies identified were: 1) Incentivize growth in the Targeted Growth Areas (TGA); and 2) Evaluate zoning outside areas served by public water and sewer to maintain the rural character of the County.

This paper is intended to provide recommendations for potential growth management strategies to incentivize development to locate in the TGAs and strategies to reduce pressures to convert rural areas for new housing developments. Background information will examine the current situation relative to growth in the County. Past development practices that were used to attempt to incentivize growth into the Urban Services Area (USA) and TGAs and slow the pace of rural development will be summarized. A survey of peer locality development strategies will be provided. State Code provisions will be identified for potential incentives to meet these goals. The conclusion will include several recommendations for policy and development ordinance changes that can be considered as new growth management strategies leading to the envisioned Healthy Growth.

**BACKGROUND:**

Stafford County is a locality in transition. The once rural county has seen substantial growth since the opening of Interstate 95 in the late 1960s. Being located just 45 miles south of the nation's capital, it has become a prime location for exurban commuters to employment in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. The County established its first subdivision ordinance in 1962 and zoning ordinance in 1964. The County's first vision for growth and development was created with the 1975 Comprehensive Plan. At that time, substantial growth had not occurred, but efforts were made to centralize areas for suburban densities.

During the 1970s, the County realized the importance of its location relative to the Washington D.C. metropolitan area and the potential affects it could have on the rural landscape. Much of the County was zoned for agricultural use. The Board of Supervisors, in 1978, comprehensively zoned the County as a means to facilitate growth into its northern and southern designated growth areas where public sewer and water utilities existed. Rural residential areas were recognized where there were pockets of existing housing outside of the growth areas. This was reflected in the Comprehensive Plan of 1979. That plan acknowledged that the number of building permits for new home construction and corresponding population increase at that time out-paced population projections made by official state agencies. There was a desire to direct this growth to the two growth areas to prevent excessive suburban sprawl.

During the 1980s, the County's population and housing stock continued to grow. The community began to voice its concerns over the specific threats that growing development was having to the rural character of the County. Goal 4 of the 1988 Land Use Plan of the Comprehensive Plan stipulates that the rural character of the County should be preserved by encouraging growth in the Growth Area while protecting the rural areas from suburban and urban development densities. The Land Use Plan discussed the provision of public utilities and infrastructure improvements as a means to direct growth into the Growth Area where substantial growth in businesses, industry, and population was anticipated.

The sense of urgency about the impacts of growth and development on the rural areas of the County continued through the 1990s and 2000s. It is reflected in a citizens' report titled "Life in Stafford in the Year 2020, The Citizens' Vision," which is the result of a 1995 survey sent to all Stafford County homeowners. The report makes one of its primary goals to preserve the rural character and recommended that maintaining the rural character of the County should be the guiding principle in land use decisions. In 1997 and 1998, the County worked on a County-wide Land Use Study. That study recommended a number of growth management strategies for the suburban areas of the county to include cluster development; increase the width of townhouse lots, establish architectural standards, make accommodations for retirement housing, and increase the allowable density in the PD-2 district to 5.0 dwelling units per acre as long as the mix of units included at least 50 percent single-family detached homes. The Board adopted development control policies for parks and recreation that applied to all residential zoning reclassifications and cluster subdivisions. Those policies imposed minimum acreage and recreational amenity requirements for new neighborhoods.

Throughout the 2000s, the Board of Supervisors made a number of policy changes and amending the County's development regulations to address the acceleration of housing development in the County. Those attempts proposed such things as increasing the cost of proffer guidelines, implementing transportation impact fees, requiring developments to provide recreational amenities, requiring the use of allocated (net) density for residential zoning districts rather than gross density based on the entire size of a parcel, and reducing development density of residential zoning districts by 50% in order to encourage cluster development. The Board also encouraged mixed use developments where the commercial component of a project could help to off-set the fiscal impacts of new residential development.

During this time period, the Board of Supervisors made a number of unsuccessful attempts to amend the County's development regulations to address the acceleration of housing development in the rural area of the County. Those attempts proposed such things as placing a time limit on how many lots could be subdivided from a property over a given period of time, requiring property be rezoned to a new 3-acre rural residential zoning district in order to build a house on a property, changing the zoning of the rural areas to a minimum 10-acre lot size while allowing a rezoning for 3-acre lots in a new rural residential zoning district, implementing a tax credit program for voluntarily agreeing not to develop property (it would have worked similar to the land-use tax program without the requirement to pay a roll-back tax), increasing the minimum lot size for conventional subdivisions to 6 acres while allowing development on 3-acre lots through a cluster development option, and using a sliding scale (the number of lots yielded decreased as a percentage as the size of the parent parcel increased). All of those attempts to curb residential subdivisions in the rural areas failed due to strong opposition from property owners, developers and home builders.

In 2006, the Comprehensive Plan was amended to create an Economic Development Strategic Plan. That plan included creating visions for redevelopment of key areas of the County (Boswells Corner, Courthouse, Southern Gateway, and historic Falmouth). Redevelopment Area Plans were prepared for these areas envisioning mixed use development at urban densities not seen before in the County. The Redevelopment Area Plans focused on creating urban villages that were to be walkable livable communities with commercial development and housing in close proximity. The planning efforts helped to result in creating new mixed-use zoning districts such as RDA-1 Redevelopment Area -1 Boswells Corner) and P-TND (Planned Traditional Neighborhood Development).

Acknowledging the continued need to preserve rural lands of the County and the controversies generated by attempts to change zoning standards in the rural areas, the Board of Supervisors established a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program in 2007. The PDR program takes a voluntary approach to land preservation where the County and a willing land owner enter into a conservation easement agreement to preserve the land from further subdivision and future residential development. This program directly involves the use of local tax dollars and matching funds from state and federal agencies to fund the purchase of the easements.

During the decade after 2010, planning efforts continued towards place making. The Commonwealth of Virginia stepped in to require all localities like Stafford to change its Comprehensive Plans to include Urban Development Areas (UDAs). The Commonwealth acknowledged the shrinking ability to fund new road construction. The UDAs were intended to accommodate the future growth of the locality at an urban scale of density taking advantage of existing road infrastructure that could support mixed use development, walkable neighborhoods and public transit. In addition to amending the Comprehensive Plan, state code at the time required localities to update their zoning codes to allow for the mixed use developments. The County in turn created the UD zoning districts. In doing so, it set maximum residential densities at the minimum recommended levels as identified by the state.

Stafford County, like rest of the United States, was not immune to the Great Recession. From 2008 to 2012 housing growth slowed but did not stop. Population and housing projections were adjusted in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan to reflect the new reality of that time. For the first time in its Comprehensive Plan, the County identified an acceptable level of growth for the Urban Services Area (USA). Policy 1.2.11 in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan stipulated that “At least 80 percent of the future cumulative residential growth should be located inside the Urban Service Area….” This policy is used as a measurable tool to gauge the effectiveness of the growth management strategies being used. Another policy in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan recognized the importance of individual property rights while still considering land use policy changes. Policy 1.1.7 stated “This plan should be implemented in respect to and in consideration of private property rights". In continuation of the efforts for voluntary land preservation and incentivizing development in the USA, the County adopted a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program. The TDR program allows a property owner in a designated rural area of the County to record a conservation easement on the property, sever the developments right, and voluntarily transfer that development density to a project in a designated area within the Urban Services Area.

Similar to the national economy, the County's economic conditions significantly improved after 2012. By the year 2017, significant concerns began to reappear regarding the increased pace of residential growth, especially in the rural areas of the County. The County saw an increase in by-right development in its rural areas and this became a big concern to the Board of Supervisors. Since 1978, the minimum lot size for residential development in the rural areas of the County has not changed. As part of its long term land preservation strategy in 2012, the County amended its cluster development standards allowing for reduced lots sizes at the same development density in exchange for open space lands. The Board observed, however, that the design of these rural cluster developments did little to retain the rural character, possibly incentivized development in the rural areas, and in some cases appeared to increase the number of lots that could be yielded through avoidance of unbuildable environmentally sensitive. The Board of Supervisors took action in March of 2018 to limit the location of rural cluster developments to areas adjacent to the Urban Services Area where public sewer and water utilities could be extended if the private systems on the relatively small lots failed.

Growth pressures are likely to continue into the future. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) in 2016 published a cooperative forecast model report. This report projected employment and population growth for the COG member localities through the year 2045. Stafford County is not a member of COG but is physically located adjacent to Prince William County which is a COG member locality. The COG projections can be informative for growth trends affecting Stafford County. COG projects the region to grow by 1.5 million people in 640,000 new households and 1.1 million jobs. The number of households would increase by 38 percent and the number of new jobs would increase by 32 percent. Some of this regional growth will spill into Stafford County as it is within commuting distance to the District of Columbia and employment centers within the COG area. In 2018, the corporate entity of AMAZON announced that it would be locating part of its east coast headquarters in Arlington, Virginia employing 25,000 people. Stafford County will likely see some pressure to provide housing for this large workforce. Other spin-off activities that rely on cheaper land prices and proximity to but not within the urban core may also locate in Stafford. These types of activities may include warehouse and distribution centers and data centers. High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes have been extended along Interstate 95 to the south of Garrisonville. The HOT lanes will be extended throughout the County by 2025 enhancing commuter options for county residents and making the County a more desirable location for people seeking reasonable priced housing in the Washington Metropolitan Area.

**<u>CURRENT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN</u>:**

The current Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2016. It designated TGAs to be similar to the previous UDA areas. Fifty percent of the future growth of the county through the year 2036 should be located in the TGAs. It retained Policy 1.2.11 meaning that new housing located in areas outside of the USA should not exceed 20% of the total projected growth by the year 2036. The 2016 Plan projects an average annual increase of approximately 1,040 dwelling units per year over the 20-year planning horizon. That correlates to 832 dwelling units per year being constructed within the USA (520 in the TGAs and 312 in Suburban Areas). No more than 208 new homes are to be built in the rural areas each year.

The 2016 Comprehensive Plan recommends that the location and rate of growth be tracked for compliance with the land use goals. On a semi-annual basis, staff compiles a map and list of active residential developments. It tracks where the development projects are located relative to inside of the USA, TGAs and outside the USA in the rural areas. Data from August 2017 indicates that the residential development already approved county-wide but not built equals approximately 8-years of projected growth. Approximately 24.6% of those approved dwelling units would be located outside the USA in the rural areas. More recent data from March 2018 showed this trend accelerating to 27.9% of the approved dwelling units would be located outside the USA in the rural areas. That was an increase of more than 3% over six months. As of September 2018, the percentage has not changed. 2,045 lots have been approved but yet to be built upon outside of the USA. This accommodates 10 years of projected growth based on the planned rate of approximately 200 dwellings per year in the rural areas to maintain the desired 80/20 split between urban and rural growth. Half of the projected rural growth identified in the Comprehensive Plan for the current 20-year planning horizon has already been approved and is available to be built on.

As of March 2018 and further validated in September 2018, development outside the USA in the rural areas of the County was occurring at a rate nearly 8% greater than the 2016 and 2010 Comprehensive Plans recommended. This rate of development quantifies and reinforces the concerns of the community and the Board of Supervisors regarding the pace of rural development, and the detrimental effects on the rural character of the County. Many of these detrimental effects manifest themselves in perception among residents that their quality of life is declining. Development of rural areas can give way to feelings of over-crowding, loss of traditional lifestyles and landscapes, safety concerns due to increased traffic on substandard roadways, and increased tax burden to provide services. This has contributed significantly towards the Board's strategic desire of incentivizing growth in the TGAs.

Efforts from the 1970s to the present to steer residential development away from the rural areas by promoting development within the USA and offering a voluntary PDR and TDR programs have had limited success. The County's voluntary land preservation programs have not preserved land in the rural areas of the County at a comparable rate to the growth which has occurred in those same areas. Since the inception of the PDR program, 660 acres of land and 170 development rights located outside the USA has been preserved. The Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program has preserved 132 acres and 50 development rights. This pales in comparison to the approximately 6,771 acres consumed for development and approximately 1,266 homes built in the rural areas over the same period. Similarly, the TDR program has been largely underutilized since its inception in 2013, only retiring the first development rights under the program at the end of 2017. The Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program has preserved 132 acres and 50 development rights. The program allows for a one-to-one transfer of development rights. TDR is one of the few development tools the County has to directly relocate rural housing development from undesirable areas to the TGAs in the form of higher density urban development.

If done correctly, a TDR program has a huge potential to influence Healthy Growth. The current TDR program is limited in geographic area covering the Courthouse Area TGA and the Marlborough Point and Crows Nest Peninsulas. However, excluding the 50 development rights already severed and ready to be transferred, there are an additional 453 development rights that are pending severance. If all of those development rights were severed, 1,050 acres would be preserved for rural purposes and 503 new dwelling units could be built in the Courthouse TGA. There are three residential subdivisions pending in the Courthouse TGA that plan on utilizing 280 of the planned development rights. If applied on a broader scale, they may be more voluntary opportunities for long term growth management.

Much of the residential growth in the past two decades has occurred from by-right development and has not been facilitated by zoning reclassifications. Approximately 91.2% of the 20,599 new homes constructed and occupied from the years 2000 through 2018 were built by-right without being subject to a zoning reclassification supporting the Comprehensive Plan. This means that the majority of new development has been taking place based on the zoning scheme established in 1978. Of the zoning reclassifications that were approved between 2000 and 2018, 6,498 dwelling units were approved and 2,649 were built. The remaining 3,846 unit to be built could accommodate 3-years of the Comprehensive Plan, projected growth. Given that 12 years of projected residential growth identified in the Comprehensive Plan has yet to be approved, the Board has a great opportunity to positively influence where the future growth will occur and what form it will take.

**The Comprehensive Plan has a number of goals and policies focused on growth management and providing incentives for housing in the USA and TGAs and affecting rural growth.**

**Goal 1 of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan is to "*manage growth and development in a sustainable manner.*"** Sustainable development is defined as "*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*." The Plan acknowledges that a sprawling growth pattern of low-density development, which disperses residents over a wide area, consumes resources at a rate greater than can be replenished. It identifies a number of policies to be implemented in order to incentivize growth in the USA and TGAs:

> Policy 1.2.2. The County will establish measures to encourage new development within the Urban Services Area in order to reduce the growth pressure in the rural parts of the County.
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> Policy 1.2.8. To the extent possible, feasible and consistent with other goals of the Comprehensive Plan, the County may adopt financial and other incentives to direct development into the Targeted Growth Areas.
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> Policy 1.2.9. Residential density "bonuses" in the Urban Services Area, and within Targeted Growth Areas, should be tied to reductions in residential density outside the Urban Services Area.

Policy 1.3.2. The County will work with the private sector in efforts to revitalize commercial, office and industrial areas and corridors.

Policy 1.3.3. In-fill and redevelopment efforts will be encouraged in appropriate areas in the Urban Services Area, and the County's promotion will focus on Boswell's Corner, the Courthouse Area, Falmouth, and the Southern Gateway Area, as shown as Redevelopment Areas on the Land Use Plan map. Special Area plans should be adopted as elements of this Comprehensive Plan for these areas for the purpose of establishing future land use patterns, types, and intensities, and circulation and building design.

Policy 1.3.4. The County shall, where appropriate, consider alternatives to conventional zoning regulations to support a development pattern consistent with the goals and objectives of the Redevelopment Areas and allow infill development that minimizes impact on adjacent uses. Examples include performance and incentive zoning, sometimes referred to as form based codes.

**Objective 1.4 stipulates that residential growth in the rural areas outside of the USA should be discouraged.** This Objective has five policies that accompany it, which acknowledge that the rural areas should be characterized by large lot residential subdivisions, agricultural activities and open lands. In these rural areas, there would be significant limitations on the ability to provide public infrastructure and services and road improvements should be limited to safety improvements. Development in the rural areas should be restricted by applying the highest standards allowable under state law for building and development in agricultural areas. Below is a discussion of some of the limitations on public services:

<u>Water Supply:</u>
The County in February 2018 completed a Groundwater Resources Evaluation for the Piedmont Aquifer. This study was initiated by the Board of Supervisors after receiving complaints from residents regarding lack of adequate potable water supplies from recently drilled wells. The study in general concluded that the maximum safe yield could accommodate "…an additional 6,500 households within the study area could withdraw groundwater at typical rates without causing significant negative impacts to the study area's hydrologic system." 6,500 new homes are more than the maximum 20% projection in the Comprehensive Plan of 4,160 new homes (208 homes /year x 20 years). Extrapolating into the future, significant negative impacts could be observed in future years if the rural areas grow at a rate projected in the Comprehensive Plan.

Low well yield areas comprise 25.48% of the Piedmont geological area within the County. Low yield wells often require wells to be drilled deeper or necessitate the use of storage tanks to ensure adequate flow of water during normal household use. Low yield wells are also more susceptible to changes in precipitation levels and rates of surface water run-off due to the limited nature of rock fractures allowing groundwater to infiltrate into the well. It can be surmised that increased impervious cover due to new development could potentially have long term negative implications for low yield wells where more rainwater runs off impervious areas rather than soaks into the ground. Cumulative situations of observed low well yields will place more pressure on the County to provide public drinking water to those areas. Extension of public drinking water lines to remote areas will have both high costs for construction and maintenance.

Fire and Rescue:

Like many rapidly growing suburban communities, Stafford County includes many areas that vary greatly in geography as well as in the level of available supporting infrastructure. Specifically, rural areas (areas outside of the designated Urban Services Area) can present a significantly complex, challenging and costly demand to fire and rescue operations. With increased travel distances and limited routes to emergency scenes, response times are typically higher not only for the first apparatus to arrive but also for critical supporting apparatus to arrive. This delay in hazard mitigation often results in larger sized incidents that require more personnel, apparatus and a longer duration to resolve the situation. Furthermore, the proximity and density of structures and overall population tend to be lower in these areas. Although this does help to reduce the scale of losses, it can also dramatically decrease the return on investment for placing emergency units throughout these areas to achieve an equivalent level of service or other response parameter throughout the County. Finally, the lack of a readily available water supply can further hinder firefighting operations by increasing not only the time needed to locate and transport water with vehicles (known as tankers) but also requires apparatus above and beyond the standard assignment sent to areas served by public water and fire hydrants. For example, a typical house fire assignment in the rural areas of the County that do not have fire hydrants includes adding at least three tankers and one engine specifically to handle the lack of a readily available water supply.

Law Enforcement:

The primary driver of workload, and therefore required expenditures, for patrol activities is calls for service. In Stafford County calls for service continue to grow, necessitating the need for additional personnel and associated equipment, therefore increasing the overall cost to operate. Increases in calls for service occur, in general, in areas of increased density of people (including residential and commercial growth).

To estimate the predicted increase of workload of specific types of developments (designed to increase the density of people), the Sheriff's Office has developed a process which compares the workload (calls for service) in known areas to the proposed development. This is then converted to the needed increase in personnel and equipment (and the associated cost).

Remote areas, which have not developed, do not contribute significantly to the numbers of calls for service or for increases in criminal activities. Therefore, rural areas in and of themselves, are not contributing to increases in providing law enforcement services.

Transportation:

Most rural roads in the County do not meet modern construction standards. As such, significant capacity and safety issues arise as traffic volumes increase. Each single family dwelling is estimated to generate 10 vehicle trips per day. Based on current CIP funding capacity, the County will not be in a position to significantly contribute funding towards any transportation improvements until after the year 2023.

Schools:

Buses in urban locations can be used more efficiently as the stops are closer together and the buses can be loaded more to capacity. In an effort to maintain bus routes to 60 minutes or less those in rural locations run out of time before they run out of capacity which results in a less efficient use of buses. Due to capacity constraints for providing water and sewage sanitation, all but one County school is located in the Urban Services Area. This exacerbates the problem of school bus trip times. Hartwood Elementary School is the only school in the County that relies on a well and separate sewage discharge system. These systems have had the need to be improved over the years to handle capacity of added school children.

**Goal 2. Ensure that growth and development is managed in a fiscally responsible manner.**

> Policy 2.6.2. Priority should be given to meeting capital improvement, road and other infrastructure needs within the Targeted Growth Area, and to a lesser extent the remainder of the USA.

It is widely understood and recognized principle that the cost to provide public services is higher for more remote locations. Distance from the source of services is a significant factor. Transportation related services such as providing school bus service to children, fire and rescue response, and police response increase with the distance of the residence from the nearest bus terminal, school, fire station, or police station. Additionally, there are increased costs associated with fuel usage; mileage on vehicles requiring more frequent and costly repair, maintenance, and replacement; and compensation for manpower necessary to offer the services. In the case of fire suppression efforts, these increased costs also entail using tanker trucks and larger fire apparatus, and additional manpower to haul water to the scene of a fire as public water is not available in the rural areas. Some of these costs can be quantified as follows:

Fire and Rescue:

According to the most current County Capital Improvement Plan information, apparatus to fight fires for locations where public hydrants don't exist cost approximately $742,000.00 along with the personnel costs that exceed $2,190,000.00 to operate these units throughout the year. The financial numbers alone represent an annual cost of the County of at least $2,387,866 each year over the 15-year life span of the apparatus. Common solutions including strategically placed water sources or the incorporation of residential fire sprinklers are two important tools that can help reduce this impact of rural incidents to the Fire and Rescue system however due to state regulations, those solutions are usually only able to be requested, not required of future development.

Law Enforcement:

Data that would provide the cost per call to rural areas versus developed areas is not analyzed currently and would require a significant effort to do so (other than gross estimates). Because the majority of calls for service are in developed areas and developed areas continue to contribute the most to increases in the need for service, the value of such analysis may not be realized. It is possible and achievable to predict the impact of specific development (or proposed increases in density) to increases in workload and therefore the cost to operate.

The replacement cost for a typical fully equipped police vehicle is $52,000. Operating cost per mile is unknown at this time. Sheriff Department vehicles cumulatively travel approximately 4 million miles per year.

<u>Transportation:</u>
Increased residential development in remote areas exacerbate safety risks on substandard roadways which are not built to handle fast-moving passenger vehicles competing for the same roadway space as farm machinery, farm vehicles, pedestrians, and school buses. These concerns about safety risks result in the County having to improve these rural roadways when they have not reached traffic volume thresholds to warrant construction of additional lanes. Recent examples of such costs incurred by the County and the residents of the County include road construction and safety improvement projects on Mountain View Road, Poplar Road, and Brooke Road. Had slower rates of rural development occurred, more in line with the Comprehensive Plan's recommendation, then those projects may not have risen to a priority for the County, and those transportation funds could have been used within the USA for improvements to widen more frequently traveled, higher volume roads such as Jefferson Davis Highway, Shelton Shop Road, and White Oak Road.

In recent years, the County has completed four road improvement projects to address safety and capacity concerns on rural roadways. The average cost per mile for those projects is over $6.7 million per mile as seen in the chart below.

| **Project Name** | **Length of Project** | **Total Cost** | **Cost/Mile** | **Cost/Mile Adjusted for Inflation (30%)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poplar Road Phase 2 | 0.464 | $ 2,625,943 | $ 5,659,360 | $ 7,357,167.89 |
| Mountain View Phase 1 | 1.297 | $ 6,141,453 | $ 4,735,122 | $ 6,155,658.37 |
| Mountain View Phase 2 | 0.497 | $ 2,988,670 | $ 6,013,421 | $ 7,817,446.68 |
| Brooke Road | 1.791 | $ 7,742,874 | $ 4,323,213 | $ 5,620,176.55 |
| | | | | |
| | | | *Avg Cost/Mile =* | *$ 6,737,612.37* |

Given that the Comprehensive Plan stipulates that road improvements should be prioritized to the Urban Services Area, it may be more than a decade before the County will be making significant safety improvements to rural roads.

<u>Schools:</u>
The per-mile cost to operate a mainstream bus is $3.28 and a special-needs bus is $4.14. Buses are typically replaced between 200,000 - 250,000 miles. The state recommendation for school bus replacement is not based on mileage but rather on years. That recommendation is 15 years. The cost to replace a mainstream bus is $103,472 while the cost to replace a special-needs bus is $109,102.

**Goal 4 of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan is to "*ensure the health, safety and well-being of Stafford County residents.*" Policy 4.1.1 states that the County should "*establish mechanisms to encourage active agricultural uses, and to re-establish active agricultural uses outside of the Urban Service Area.*"** Implementation of this policy is important to ensure that the County has a sustainable food supply and healthy community. Allowing extensive residential development in the rural areas of the County is contrary to this goal, as it prioritizes new home construction over agricultural goods production. There are many locally supported agricultural farmers markets within the County, who depend on goods produced within a local radius. The continuation of these businesses and the production of fresh produce and products should be encouraged, and increased residential development in the rural areas overshadows these agricultural uses.

The Comprehensive Plan acknowledges that agriculture's economic role has been diminished in the County. However, it is still a defining characteristic of the area and should not be completely dismissed. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 2007 Census, there were 233 operational farms, comprising 19,816 acres with an estimated market value of $2,798,000. The most recent 2012 Census of Agriculture showed declines all of those indicators. In 2012, Stafford County had 215 farms in operation that occupied 15,260 acres of land. The average farm size was 71 acres and the market value of production was $2,739,000. Staff notes that these declines are indicative of conversion and preparation for continued conversion of agricultural lands for residential development.

**Goal 5. Promote affordable and quality housing.**

> Policy 5.1.2. Incorporate criteria in the County's monetary proffer guidelines that offer credit for providing affordable housing.
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> Policy 5.2.1. Create land-use incentives for private development of affordable housing.
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> Policy 5.2.2. Identify publicly owned properties that could be redeveloped as public housing for public employees.
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> Policy 5.3.2. Affordable housing will be encouraged in, but not limited to, Targeted Growth Areas, as designated on the Land Use Plan Map.

**Goal 6. Create an intermodal system of transportation which implements the Land Use Plan by providing a safe, efficient and affordable means for our people and products to move safely in and through Stafford County.**

Policy 6.2.2. Encourage the future expansion and development of an efficient transit system inside the Urban Services Area and Targeted Growth Areas to serve higher density employment, retail and residential areas and sectors of the population with limited mobility. Where practical, transit systems should provide access from residential areas to commuter rail stations and park and ride lots.

**Goal 7. Support the economic vitality of Stafford County through land use policies.**

Policy 7.1.1. Minimum floor area ratios should be established and maximum floor area ratio requirements should be relaxed for commercial development within mixed use redevelopment and Targeted Growth Areas. Encourage an appropriate mix of uses, with a minimum of 25% land and/or building area designated for commercial or business use, depending on the land use.

**Goal 8. Support Stafford County as a community for superior education.**

Policy 8.1.2. Future schools should be located within the Urban Services Area (USA). Exceptions may be made when the only way to meet Level of Service Standards or location criteria contained in the Public Facilities Plan is to locate the facility outside the USA or when land is dedicated to the County and the development of the site and any required infrastructure would not be cost prohibitive or detrimental to its growth management policies.

**STATE CODE PROVISIONS:**

The State Code gives localities specific authority to incentivize residential growth in designated areas. Many of the incentives involve increased density for by-right development. To some degree, there are economic incentives such as the ability to grant some limited fee waivers and to target construction of public infrastructure.

*Sec. 15.2-958.4* allows upon adoption of a local ordinance, the ability to provide for a waiver of building permit and other local fees for non-profit agencies constructing or providing affordable housing.

*Sec. 15.2-2223.1* allows the County to establish Urban Development Areas. The County has done so in establishment of its TGAs. These areas are designated for higher development densities. They can be designed as mixed use neighborhoods with commercial development and a mix of housing types. Development of the TGAs can be phased. The Comprehensive Plan shall describe financial and other incentives for development in those areas. This implies that the County has the authority to selectively adjust development fees or streamline development approval processes to incentive development in the TGAs compared to other areas of the County. Additionally federal, state and local funding for infrastructure is to be focused on the TGAs. Enhanced infrastructure would help to make the TGAs desirable locations to build new housing.

*Sec. 15.2-2283* establishes the purpose of zoning ordinances. That code provision specifically speaks about growth management in that it allows localities to facilitate the creation of convenient attractive and harmonious communities, protect against overcrowding of land, protect against undue density of population in relation to community facilities existing or available, and promote the creation and preservation of affordable housing to meet the current and future needs of the County. As a result, the County has the authority to establish development densities in its zoning categories and zone properties accordingly.

*Sec. 15.2-2286* allows the County to adopt "Incentive Zoning". "Incentive Zoning" means the use of bonuses in the form of increased project density or other benefits to a developer in return for the developer providing certain features, design elements, uses services, or amenities desired by the County. Once the incentives are established in the zoning ordinance, the increase in density would be a by-right option for the developer subject to provision of the additional requirements identified by the County. Incentive zoning could be applied to areas located within the USA and/or TGAs.

*Sec. 15.2-2286.1* allows the County through it development regulations for grant density bonuses in certain zoning districts that allow for cluster development. Currently, the R-1, Suburban Residential zoning category allows for a density bonus upon approval of a Conditional Use Permit (CUP). The CUP process is costly and takes several months for approval. Consideration could be made to amend the cluster development regulations to allow for a density bonus as a by-right activity in exchange for enhanced community amenities. The R-1 zoning district is required to be located within the USA. Allowing the density bonus could further facilitate development the Suburban Areas of the USA. The Comprehensive Plan currently recommends development densities of up to three units per acre in the Suburban Areas. The current maximum density allowed in the R-1 zone is 1.5 units per acre. The current density bonus allows development up to 2.25 units per acre.

*Sec. 15.2-2316.2* allows the County through its Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program to grant density bonuses for owners sending development rights from a designated sending area(s) to the designated receiving area(s). The County currently has a TDR program in effect. It is limited to one Sending Area and one Receiving Area. Its applicability could be expanded to further encourage voluntary directing growth from the rural areas of the County to the TGAs. The current program allows for a direct transfer of development rights at a one to one ratio. Consideration could be made to allow for density bonuses to further incentivize the use of TDR.

**Peer Locality Urban Growth Management Strategies**

The table below provides a comparison of growth management strategies for Stafford County and its peer localities. The table was based on analysis of Comprehensive Plan policies and programs that are in place in each jurisdiction. Six different strategies were identified for comparison purposes. Stafford County utilizes four of the six strategies. Only Stafford and Hanover Counties have a desired ratio of urban versus rural development as a growth management metric. Four of the seven localities use density bonuses as an incentive for desired development practices.

| | Peer Locality Growth Management Strategies | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Strategy** | Stafford | Albemarle | Fauquier | Hanover | Loudoun | Prince William | Spotsy |
| Designated UDA's | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Special Area Master Plans | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Promotes Infill & Redevelopment | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Promotes higher density areas as more desirable places to live | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| Allows density bonuses when conditions met (affordable housing, design elements) | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Urban / Rural Growth Policy | 80/20 | | | 70/30 | | | |

**Peer Locality Rural Growth Management Strategies**

The table below compares strategies used by the peer localities for rural land preservation.

| | Peer Locality Growth Management Strategies | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Strategy** | Stafford | Albemarle | Fauquier | Hanover | Loudoun | Prince William | Spotsy |
| PDR Program | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Voluntary Easement Program | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| TDR Program | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Rural Econ Dev't Program | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Ag/Forest Districts | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Land Use Taxation | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Combine with Cultural, Scenic and Envir. Component | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Public Education/ Communication | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Partner with Land Trusts | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Set Acreage Target for Open Space | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Establish Conservation Design Policies | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |

All of these counties have zoning regulations that affect the development potential in the designated rural areas. All of these localities have either larger minimum lot size requirements or more restrictive requirements for subdividing property in their respective agricultural areas than Stafford County.

A summary of the requirements are listed in the table below:

| Agricultural Density in Comparative Localities | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Locality*** | ***County Code Section*** | ***Agricultural Zoning Districts*** | ***Minimum Lot Area – Conventional Subdivision*** | ***Minimum Lot Area – Cluster Subdivision*** |
| | | | | |
| Stafford | Sec. 28-35 | A-1 Agricultural<br>A-2 Rural Residential | A-1: One home per 3 acres<br>A-2: One home per 1 acre | A-1: One home per 1.5 acres.<br>A-2: One home per 0.7 acres. |
| | | | | |
| Albemarle | Sec. 18-10.4<br>Sec. 10.3.1<br>Sec. 10.3.3 | RA Rural Area | RA: One home per 2 acres for conventional & cluster development.<br>*Albemarle County's Rural Area contains a minimum lot size as well as a limit to the total number of lots of less than 21 acres based on parcels of record as of 12/10/80. A developer cannot obtain any more density by clustering than they can through conventional means. The total number of lots permitted for a parcel of 21 acres or less is 5 lots. If a parcel is 21 or more acres, any number of lots can be developed provided the density does not exceed one home per 21 acres. (Ex: 210 Parcel/21 acres = 10 lots of 21 acres). | |
| | | | | |
| Fauquier | *Zoning Ord. 2-308<br>Zoning Ord. 3-4<br>Zoning Ord. 3-2 | RC Rural Conservation<br>RA Rural Agricultural<br>RR-2 Rural Residential | *RC: Min: One home per 10 acres, Max: 11 homes per 205 acres.<br>*RA: Min: One home per 10 acres, Max: 11 homes per 205 acres.<br>RR-2: One home per 2 acres.<br>*Density based on Sliding Scale. | RC: One home per 2 acres; parcel of 30+ acres w/ 85% open space.<br>RA: One home per 2 acres; parcel of 30+ acres w/ 85% open space.<br>RR-2: One home per 2 acres w/ 50% open space. |
| | | | | |
| Hanover | Sec. 26-24, 30<br>Sec. 26-39<br>Sec. 26-48 | A-1 Agricultural<br>AR-6 Agricultural Residential<br>RC Rural Conservation | A-1: One home per 10 acres<br>*AR-6: One home per 2 acres, two lot max. (4-13.99a), One home per 2 acres, three lot max (14-24.99a), One home per 5 acres, 1 lot per 6.25a max (25+a)<br>RC: One home per 6.25 acres<br>*Contingent upon size of parcel (in acres [a]) being subdivided. | *A-1: One home per 2 or less acres.<br>AR-6: Clustering not permitted.<br>RC: Clustering not permitted<br>*Only district where clustering is permitted. |
| | | | | |
| Loudon | Sec. 2-100<br>Sec. 2-200<br>Sec. 2-300<br>Sec. 2-400 | AR-1 Agricultural Rural-1<br>AR-2 Agricultural Rural-2<br>A-10 Agriculture<br>A-3 Agricultural Residential | AR-1: One home per 20 acres (Base Division); 80,000 sq. ft. (Principal/Subordinate)<br>AR-2: One home per 40 acres (Base Division); 80,000 sq. ft. (Principal/Subordinate).<br>A-10: One home per 10 acres<br>A-3: One home per 3 acres | AR-1: One home per 4 or less acres<br>AR-2: One home per 4 or less acres<br>A-10: One home per 3 acres<br>A-3: Clustering not permitted. |
| | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Prince William | Sec. 32-301.05<br>Sec. 32-300.40-42<br>Sec. 32-302.01-06<br>Sec. 32-302.11-16<br>Sec. 32-302.21-26<br>Sec. 32-300.50-53 | A-1 Agricultural<br>SR1 Semi-Rural<br>SR 3 Semi-Rural<br>SR 5 Semi-Rural | A-1: One home per 10 acres<br>SR1: One home per 1 acre<br>SR3: One home per 3 acres<br>SR5: One home per 5 acres | A-1: One home per 3 acres minimum, one home per 5 acres maximum.<br>SR1, SR3, & SR 5: 1 home per 20,000 sq. ft. w/public water & sewer; 1 home per 1 acre w/o public water & sewer. |
| | | | | |
| Spotsylvania | Sec. 23-6.3.4<br>Sec. 23-6.4.4<br>Sec. 23-6.5.4 | A-2 Agricultural 2<br>A-3 Agricultural 3<br>RA Resort Agricultural | A-2: One home per 5 acres<br>A-3: One home per 10 acres<br>RA: One home per 2 acres | A-2: One home per 2 acres<br>A-3: One home per 3 acres<br>RA: Zone does not permit cluster subdivisions as a use. |

**POTENTIAL STRATEGIES TO INCENTIVIZE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE TARGETED GROWTH AREAS:**

Developers and builders of residential housing attempt to meet market demands while making a profit. The demand for housing within the County remains strong. The market is driven by demands for specific types of housing such as apartments, condominiums, townhomes, single family detached homes for young single adults, young families, established families, active adults in their retirement years and housing for the elderly and disabled.

Growth management strategies to incentivize development within the USA and TGAs will mainly relate to the efficiencies of development densities and fees charged for services. Timing and certainty of development approvals also can help to facilitate the preferred types of development. Where the efficiencies of development densities off-set the high costs of land and construction costs, developers and home builders can realize the profit margins necessary to facilitate residential development desired by the County. The County can directly influence the aspects of density through its zoning regulations and to some degree influence development costs through its timeliness of approvals, land development regulations, and fee charges. Consistency and timeliness of approvals also helps to minimize risk for developers and enhances their willingness to invest in the real estate market.

The Comprehensive Plan projects that 50 percent of the future growth in the County by 2036 should take place in the TGAs. Specifically, the TGAs should accommodate 9,820 dwelling units or 493 dwellings per year over the 20 year planning horizon. Examining pending applications for zoning reclassifications and new subdivisions to be located in the TGA, we find that 2,334 dwelling units are being proposed. If all of those pending dwelling units were to be approved, 7,486 additional dwelling units would be necessary to meet the desired planning goal for the remaining 17 years of the Comprehensive Plan's duration. That is equivalent to building 440 dwelling units a year for each of those 17 years. It should be noted that it takes approximately two to three years after approval of a zoning reclassification for a development projects to start producing dwelling units.  Large development projects may take multiple years to be completed once construction has commenced.

The Comprehensive Plan has a suitability matrix identifying the readiness of the TGAs for development. This can be used as a starting point for determining a preferred growth management strategy to incentivize development in the TGAs.

The below listing of strategies is not in rank order and is not a complete listing of all possible solutions. The listed strategies are not mutually exclusive and one or more may be utilized together or separately. It is intended to focus discussions on how the Board could proceed with Healthy Growth.

**Strategy # 1:**

*Consider adopting a policy for prioritizing and streamlining zoning reclassifications* -  Such a policy could give an affirmative preference to projects to be in the TGAs compared to the Suburban Areas of the USA.  The statement of preference could indicate the willingness to process and approve zoning reclassifications in an accelerated manner for property located in the TGAs that meet the land use recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan.  Projects could be evaluated based on the timeliness of the reclassification application relative to the development readiness of the selected TGA. The formal acknowledgement of this preference and willingness to approve projects may incentivize investors to reclassify property for desired development.

**Strategy #2:**

*Consider density increases for development in the TGAs* - As explained above, the residential density adopted for the UD zoning district was set at the minimum limit identified by state code.  This minimum limit is the bottom threshold of density that can support walkable neighborhoods and investment in public transit.  At the Board of Supervisors planning meeting held on February 1, 2019, there was an extensive discussion about the prospect of creating a "Downtown Stafford".  During the discussions, the Board seemed amenable to increasing density of the UD zoning districts.  Specifically, densities for mixed use and multi-family dwellings were discussed as needing at least 40 dwelling units per acre to support structured parking.  The use of elevators and structured parking were considered desired features of the planned TGAs for both commercial and residential uses.

Increased densities can assist developers to off-set high land acquisition and development costs. Current density limitations especially for multi-family development require purchases of large land tracts.  Zoning regulations that lead to increased density and more compact development allow for less land to be purchased and a relative cost savings for developers. Increasing density through incentive zoning could be an avenue to explore.  However, unlike proffers with zoning reclassifications, incentives for additional density must be known up-front and must be provided on the site of the development project.  Incentive features often entail preservation of land for parks and open space or providing desired recreational amenities.

**Strategy #3:**

*County initiated zoning reclassifications* – The Board of Supervisors through its zoning powers can pro-actively reclassify property for desired development. Establishing desired zoning up-front may facilitate desired development. It minimizes time, expense and risk to developers. Most zoning reclassifications are initiated by individual property owners. Proffers are voluntarily offered by the property owners to off-set impacts of the proposed development in order to gain zoning approval. Proffers can relate to a variety of things such as: uses allowed on a property; building height, size and architecture; configuration of development; impacts to public facilities including monetary payments to assist the County with construction of streets, schools, fire stations, and parks.

A major consideration related to County initiated zoning reclassification is that the County cannot accept or require proffers from the property owners in exchange for zoning entitlement approvals. This means that detailed advanced planning should be in place to ensure that community needs will be met. This may include development of master plans for properties, creation of broad architectural standards for the zoning district being imposed, and infrastructure investment to serve the envisioned development.

**Strategy #4:**

*Consider expanding the TDR program and include additional incentives for its use* - As mentioned above, the TDR program to date has had limited success but it has great potential to redirect undesirable growth from the rural areas to the TGAs. Additional incentives can be provided with the TDR program. Consideration can be made to either expand or add new sending and receiving areas. The recent flurry of TDR activity ensued after the TDR Receiving Area was expanded. Expanding the Receiving Areas to include other TGAs could increase the available land for desired development. Adding additional Sending Areas also can be used as a tool to reinforce the desire to direct housing growth from the rural areas to the TGAs.

The current development right ratio is one to one. One development right to be sent from a sending area is equivalent to one residential development right or 3,000 square feet of commercial floor area in a receiving area. Consideration can be made to enhance this ratio where properties in far-out areas of the County could attain a higher ratio for each development right severed from the property. The logic being, properties located further from the USA and county services cost the taxpayers more money than properties located closer-in to the USA. Therefore, it would be better to incentivize owners of those further-out properties to conserve their land rather than be developed for housing. Pending state legislation if adopted at the local level could also incentivize the expansion of the TDR program by allowing the county to designate development rights to go from one sending area to a specific receiving area. This further enhances the growth management abilities of the TDR program. Development rights could more readily be directed to TGAs that have adequate public facility capacities to accommodate them.

One area of caution for pursuing expansion of the TDR program is its land conservation aspect. When development rights are severed from a property, a deed of covenants is recorded. That deed restricts the future use of the property for land conservation purposes. Efforts to remove those deed restrictions could be quite extensive. TDR sending areas should be located in areas where long-term future development is not contemplated. TDR sending areas should not be located adjacent to the USA or any area where the USA boundary may be expanded beyond the current 20 year planning horizon.

**Strategy #5:**

*Provide greater incentives for mixed use development* – From a fiscal perspective, development projects that include both commercial and residential components typically generate more tax revenue than strictly residential projects. The TGAs encourage mixed use development at a walkable scale. Consideration can be made to allow increased development densities for mixed use buildings. Another possible incentive could be to apply a credit towards monetary proffers accepted as part of a zoning reclassification application. Credits could be scaled based on the projected fiscal benefit of a project. This would require a detailed revenue, cost, and expenditure analysis to be developed and agreed to by the County and the developer.

**Strategy #6:**

*Prepare small area plans to provide clear direction* – The Comprehensive Plan identifies five TGAs (Courthouse, Centreport, Southern Gateway, Leeland and Brooke). The TGAs are intended to be walkable mixed use centers of activity. Currently the core area of the Courthouse TGA has a developed small area plan that specifies detail on street layout and uses for property. The reminder of the Courthouse TGA and the other TGAs have no detailed plans but include broad land use suggestions. Preparing detailed small area plans for the TGAs may help to improve opportunities for investments in the TGAs by reducing uncertainty about what land use types will be acceptable to the County and what infrastructure improvements may be required. Preparing these plans will require significant community input as well as significant commitment by the County.

**Strategy #7:**

*Provide fiscal incentives to off-set the impact of development costs in the TGAs* - Another potential means to incentivize development in the TGAs is to reduce or spread out development costs. Reduced development costs or costs incurred over a long time period could off-set high land costs and improve the profitability of a development project making it more desirable for investment. Incentives could be geared towards the county constructing or reimbursing developers for constructing needed public infrastructure. This may be accomplished through such mechanisms as establishment of Community Development Authorities (CDA), Service Districts, and Tax Increment Financing (TIF). CDAs and service districts would help the county with financing public infrastructure such as roads, utilities, parks and schools. This would be an avoidance of up-front costs for a developer. The bonds for constructing the public improvements would be paid back over time by the property owners located in a specified service area. Use of TIF would assist developers in attracting development financing. The money generated by not charging the incremental increase in tax revenue helps a developer to assure lenders that there is some guarantee of revenue to pay-off the debt for constructing infrastructure. TIF is typically use for single development projects rather than multiple projects over a larger geographic area such as CDAs and service districts.

**POTENTIAL RURAL GROWTH MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES:**

The past approaches to temper development pressures in the rural areas of the County have been largely ineffective. The Board of Supervisors at its 2018 Planning Retreat requested staff to proceed in a new direction and develop more effective and efficient growth management strategies for the rural areas of the County. In developing a new framework, staff reviewed rural land strategies from peer localities as described above. Staff also prepared some quantitative analysis. A build-out analysis was developed using GIS data and the growth projections of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan to determine what the future minimum lot size requirement in the rural areas would need to be in order to maintain the desired 20% rural residential development ratio. Staff also evaluated acreage requirements to sustain agricultural activities.

<u>A-1 ZONING BUILD-OUT ANALYSIS:</u>

Staff modeled a scenario where all A-1 zoned located outside of the USA and land large enough to be subdivided under the current 3-acre minimum lot was developed to its maximum potential. At full build-out, there would be approximately 9,598 additional homes. This would be an unlikely worst case scenario where there would be very few farms left in the County and much of the rural open spaces would be located on residential lots.

Staff also modeled two scenarios where the 80/20 growth policy was maintained throughout the duration of the 2036 Comprehensive Plan and also out to the year 2076. The results determined how large the resultant lot sizes in the rural areas would need to be to fulfill this requirement.

- *Scenario 1* – Buildout during Comprehensive Plan planning horizon – 19 years, out to year 2036
- *Scenario 2* - Full Buildout of all available land in the County – 59 years, out to year 2076

*Results:*

The analysis determined in each scenario the following additional residential dwelling units outside the USA and a range of minimum A-1 lot sizes required to maintain the 80/20 growth policy.

- *Scenario 1* – 2,020 additional dwelling units; minimum lot sizes of 15 to 17 acres
- *Scenario 2* – 6,386 additional dwelling units; minimum lot sizes of 4 to 5 acres

The difference in these minimum lot sizes can be attributed to the amount of growth anticipated over the different time horizons, and that growth allocated to the same area of land.

<u>ACREAGE REQUIREMENTS FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE:</u>

Stafford County's current Land Use Tax Program has minimum acreage requirements in order to be eligible for use value assessments and reduced taxable values. Agricultural and horticultural activities must be located on a minimum of 5 acres of land. Forestry requires a minimum of 20 acres. Observing the minimum lot size criteria in the zoning categories of the peer localities, it is observed that the most common lot size for agricultural zones is 10 acres. Staff would suggest that 10 acres be the baseline for sustaining agricultural activities. Note, however, that 10-acre lot sizes would not result in sustainable farming in its traditional sense. 10-acre lots may be able to support truck farm activities that support farmers markets and way-side stands as well as niche agricultural production that can be conducted in confined spaces such as berry farms.

There are a number of potential strategies that can be used as a means to regulate housing development and incentivize land preservation and continuation of agriculture in the rural areas. Some of those strategies are listed below. The strategies are not in rank order and are not mutually exclusive. Some can be used in concert or may need to be considered separately.

**STRATEGY #1:**

*Increase minimum lot sizes* - Acknowledging the outcome of the build-out analysis, the County could change the minimum lot size requirement for the A-1, Agricultural zoning district from 3 acres to 15 acres. This would reduce the number of eligible residential lots that could be attained in the A-1 district by 80%. It may require creating a new zoning district and applying those new standards to all A-1 zoned parcels located outside of the USA that are 15 acres or larger in size. If this were to be done for the cluster approved areas outside of the USA, then additional regulations for those types of cluster developments would need to be established. Another option would be to amend the existing A-1 zoning district requirements to establish a minimum lot size of 15 acres. This in effect would create many non-conforming lots.

Increasing the minimum lot size to 4 or 5 acres as indicated in Scenario 2 would have less impact on A-1 Agricultural zoning district property owners who intend on subdivide their properties. However, this would do little to preserve agriculture. Increasing the minimum lot size to 4 acres would reduce the potential number of future lots by 30%. Similarly increasing the minimum lot size to 5 acres would reduce the potential number of future lots by 60%. Four or five acre lots sizes will do little to preserve large tracts of land needed to retain a sense of rural character and would not likely affect the rate of development in the rural areas. In fact, it may accelerate the build-out of the rural areas by consuming more land for residential lots than the current 3-acre lot size.

**STRATEGY #2:**

*Create a sliding scale requirement* – Such a requirement reduces the lot yield in proportion with the size of the parent parcel. Larger tracts of land would have fewer lots per acre. Albemarle, Fauquier, and Hanover Counties have similar provisions. This would allow for smaller lot sizes and a limited number of lots. The remainder parcel would be of a substantially larger size that could support agricultural activities. The remainder parcel could not be further subdivided. This strategy would require amending the A-1 zoning district standards. If the minimum lot size was set at 1.5 acres, it could eliminate concerns over creating non-conforming lots.

An example of how this might work can be explained by using the Albemarle regulations. The Albemarle regulations allow up to five residential lots to be divided on 21 acres. After that is accomplished, there could be one lot for each additional 21 acres. Assuming the current minimum lot size of 3 acres for a non-cluster development is used, a 100 acre tract of land could yield a total of 8 lots. There would be seven 3-acre lots and one 79 acre lot. A tract of land that was 200 acres in size could yield 12 lots.

**STRATEGY #3:**

*Establish density requirements for rural subdivisions* – The A-1 and A-2 zoning districts currently specify minimum lot sizes. There are no density requirements that specify the number of acres per dwelling units. The residential zoning districts in the County establish minimum lot sizes as well as density requirements. The density requirements subtract out wetlands, floodplains, and slopes exceeding 35% from the acreage of the tract in order to determine how many residential lots can be achieved. Properties with substantial environmental constraints yield fewer lots. This type of density calculation requires the land owner to hire consultants to prepare environmental studies that are currently not required for A-1 and A-2 subdivisions. An additional consideration is that State Code limits the ability of localities to subtract out environmentally sensitive areas when determining permitted densities for cluster developments. This would result in no reduction of lot yield for cluster development while conventional subdivisions could see fewer of lots created from the same piece of property.

**STRATEGY #4**:

*Increase building setbacks and buffers from streets* – The current building setbacks from are generally 50 and 40 feet for A-1 and A-2 zoned properties. Buildings located this close to the public streets can give the appearance of a suburban neighborhood rather a rural area where homes are more widely dispersed. Requiring deeper setbacks of buffers from streets may assist with the appearance of openness and retaining rural character. However, this will do very little with regards to the pace of converting farmland for residential development.

**STRATEGY #5:**

*Implement a county-wide TDR program* – This is the same as Strategy # 4 for the TGAs. The current TDR program is limited in geographic scope. However, it shows significant promise towards meeting the growth management goals of the Comprehensive Plan. TDR is a growth management tool that allows the County to directly influence where development can occur. It provides rural land owners an additional option to receive cash compensation for their land instead of selling it to another farmer or to a developer for conversion to a residential neighborhood.

State code allows a locality to establish one or more sending and receiving areas and establish which receiving area gets development rights from what sending area. It is possible that multiple sending and receiving areas could have different incentives for using TDR. The zoning regulations in the receiving areas must be adjusted to accommodate all of the potential development rights that could be sent from a corresponding sending area. Development density bonuses in the receiving areas and bonus development rights in sending areas could be used to make participation in TDR more desirable.

The outcome of TDR is that rural land is preserved from development and that development density is transferred to the TGAs where infrastructure can handle the intensity of development. Considerations should be made as to where the TDR sending areas would be located. Sending areas should not be located within the USA or areas adjacent to the USA that may be desirable for future growth beyond the current planning horizon of the Comprehensive Plan (2036). The changes to the development densities in the receiving areas should be gauged against the planned number of dwelling units for the TGAs to ensure that those areas are not over-built.

**STRATEGY #6:**

*Expand funding for the PDR program* – The County currently has an active Purchase of Development Rights Program. Current County policies require that local funds be matched dollar for dollar with federal and state funds. Often, the timing of matching funds availability does not coincide with the availability of County funds, therefore it may take a year or longer to achieve sufficient funds to begin the process to purchase a conservation easement for the development rights of a specific property. County policy also dictates that funding for PDR come from land use roll-back tax payments. The revenue generated from those payments vary from year to year based on which properties no longer are participating in this farming and forestry tax deferral program. Changes to county policies could provide for a more consistent local funding stream. Loosening up on the policy to require 50 percent matching funds may reduce the time necessary to purchase development rights therefore facilitate the willingness of landowners to participate in the PDR program.

**STRATEGY #7:**

*Develop incentives for agribusiness* - Agribusiness and Agritourism are currently not defined terms in the zoning ordinance. The County is currently in the process of defining those terms and allowing those activities in the A-1 zoning district through a code amendment. There are several zoning ordinance amendments that could be considered to incentivize the establishment of these types of businesses. Such incentives could include reducing or eliminating site plan compliance requirements, eliminate requirements for paved or gravel parking, and allowing related activities as by-right uses with performance standards rather than requiring additional zoning approvals. Designating this as a targeted industry for economic development purposes may also assist with the ability for businesses to attain grant funding.

**CONCLUSION:**

For decades, citizens of Stafford County have been concerned about growth and development of the County especially in the rural countryside where housing development is not expected. They have expressed a desire for new development to be well planned and located where public infrastructure is adequate to handle the demands of the new residents and businesses. Focus has been on finding ways to incentivize development to locate in the USA and TGAs. Growth policies in the Comprehensive Plan have identified desired levels and form of growth in the Urban, Suburban, and Rural areas of the County. Analysis of current construction and approved development projects shows that future growth in the rural areas will exceed projections and have a negative effect on county residents. Acknowledging this in the Strategic Plan for 2040, the Board determined that more efforts need to be made to incentivize development into the TGAs.

This paper has identified a number of strategies that the Board can adopt as its means to achieve Healthy Growth. It is highly likely that more than one strategy will need to be deployed to meet the desired outcomes envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan and the Strategic Plan. Staff believes that the chosen strategies should be used in tandem for both the Rural Areas and TGAs.

**Information Sources:**


1) Stafford County Virginia, Comprehensive Plan 2016-2036
2) Stafford County Subdivision List 2007 – 2018
3) Stafford County Active Subdivision List and Map
4) Groundwater Resources Evaluation Piedmont Aquifer of Stafford County, Virginia, ECS Mid-Atlantic LLC, February 2, 2018
5) Stafford County Fire Marshall's Office – E-mail dated 8/9/2018
6) Stafford County Sheriff's Office – E-mail dated 8/9/2018
7) Stafford County Public Works Department – E-mail dated 8/8/2018
8) Stafford County Public Schools – E-mail dated 8/6/2018
9) Stafford County Fire Marshall's Office – E-mail dated 8/9/2018
10) Stafford County Sheriff's Office – E-mail dated 8/9/2018
11) Stafford County Public Works Department – E-mail dated 8/8/2018
12) Growth Trends to 2045, Cooperative Forecasting in Metropolitan Washington, November 2016, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
13) Comprehensive Plan Build-out Analysis – Department of Planning and Zoning