



Save Rural Loudoun

March 5, 2018

Jeff Salmon
Chair, Loudoun County Planning Commission
1 Harrison Street SE
Leesburg, Virginia 20177

Dear Mr. Salmon:

On behalf of Save Rural Loudoun, I am writing to point out two fundamental errors in the draft chapter on the Rural Policy Area for the new comprehensive plan. These errors are important because they imply that the County does not need to make any significant new effort to preserve what is left of the rural policy area. This may prolong a sense of complacency, which could severely undermine the stated policy goals. The policy should clearly indicate that, unless the County takes urgent new preservation measures, the rural character of large parts of the County, particularly in the north, will soon be lost under current trends.

First, the draft states that "The County's current growth management approach ... has been successful in limiting residential growth and sustaining the rural economy" (p. 2-26). This is demonstrably false.

Since 1987, Loudoun has lost 72 thousand acres of farmland to residential development, one-third of the total. There are currently 85 subdivisions being developed in the rural policy area, primarily in the north. Since 2000, the population density of the rural policy area has increased by about 80%.

It is highly misleading to describe this dramatic increase in population density and loss of agricultural land, which is continuing unabated today, as "highly successful in limiting residential growth."

Second, it is claimed that the proposed set of rural policies would leave the rural policy area "as is."

The projected addition of 7,500 new residential units in the rural policy area (p. 2-24) would represent a 60% increase in residential density above the current level. In the public comments the committee received, there is a strong sense that the current density is as far as the County should go.

It is highly misleading to suggest that a projected 60% increase in residential development would leave the rural policy area "as is."

While concerned with these errors, Save Rural Loudoun would like to note our support for a number of proposals in the draft that, if pursued more actively than in the past, could help to achieve Loudoun's citizens' desire to maintain our rural areas. They include:

- encourage the consolidation of smaller parcels for agricultural and other rural uses
- use public funds to expand permanent conservation easements, particularly in the north
- develop new zoning regulations to improve the design of approved rural residential clusters
- strengthen zoning standards for rural economy uses
- develop a variety of County public-access trail networks (equine, biking, walking, etc.)
- support farmers and other rural businesses in dealing with County administrative and regulatory requirements
- support vocational and job training for farming and other rural businesses
- strengthen the use value assessment program to strengthen the commercial viability of Loudoun's farms
- allow exceptions to some regulatory requirements for farm and historic buildings
- assist in the marketing of locally-grown products

It is important to note that timely and meaningful adoption of many of the above measures will require County staff time and budget resources. It does not help to adopt policies that are not implemented due to resource constraints, as is the case with the County's current PDR program. It is highly appropriate for the County to dedicate resources to priorities that have been so strongly endorsed by the vast majority of Loudoun's citizens, both in the east and the west.

Thank you for your work to preserve our rural areas.

Sincerely,



John Ellis
Chairman of the Board
Save Rural Loudoun

