

# 1 Introduction

The City of Fairfax (“the City”) is unique in boasting the benefits of a closely knit community that is hard to find in the Metropolitan Washington region and the access and proximity to large-city amenities and activities. Residents enjoy neighborhoods with distinct character, an active arts scene, high-quality educational institutions for all ages, easy access to natural amenities, and exceptional City services and facilities. Employees and business owners appreciate its central location within Northern Virginia; ease of access and adjacency to major

thoroughfares, and its proximity to major regional employers in the health, education, government, and legal sectors.

Nonetheless, the City is not immune to the internal and external elements that place considerable pressure on its identity and future. Its commercial and retail properties are aging and growing less competitive with nearby jurisdictions, raising questions about future development and tax burdens on City residents. Nearby localities feature newer, more in-demand housing stock to attract and retain residents. Region-wide issues

of affordable housing, aging and stressed utility infrastructure, traffic congestion, and environmental concerns similarly impact the City and those who live and work here.

As the City’s official policy guide for future development-related decisions, the 2035 Comprehensive Plan (“the Comprehensive Plan”) provides direction to enhance the City’s function, appearance, and livability based on its current conditions. It also seeks to provide the opportunity to examine the various forces affecting the City – such as redevelopment opportunities, economic competitiveness, and an increasingly strained transportation network – and propose innovative solutions that benefit City residents, workers, and visitors alike. As changes occur in and around the City, the Comprehensive Plan provides a framework for responding to and thriving as a result of these changes. Those who contributed to the Comprehensive Plan hope that readers find it a thoughtfully-crafted document that lends itself to enhancing quality of life and making the City a great place for everyone.



## Background

The City was established as the Town of Providence in 1805 following the construction of the Fairfax County Courthouse at the rural crossroads of Little River Turnpike and Ox Road. The Town became a hub of commerce within a predominantly agricultural area removed from the growing City of Washington. In 1874, the Town adopted the name Fairfax.

The Town emerged as a more significant regional crossroads when US 50 and US 29 were created in 1926 as part of the original U.S. Highway System. These roadways supported the City's economic growth as businesses expended around the needs of travelers, and the industries serving the surrounding dairy farms. Federal housing programs following World War II catalyzed suburban development in the City, attracting veterans and their families and spurring rapid population growth. The Town was incorporated as the City of Fairfax in 1961. Further economic growth was fueled by the establishment of George Mason University along the City's southern border in 1964, the opening of Interstate 66 along the northern border in 1982, the extension of the Metrorail Orange Line from Washington to the nearby Vienna/Fairfax-GMU station in 1986, and continued overall growth of the region.

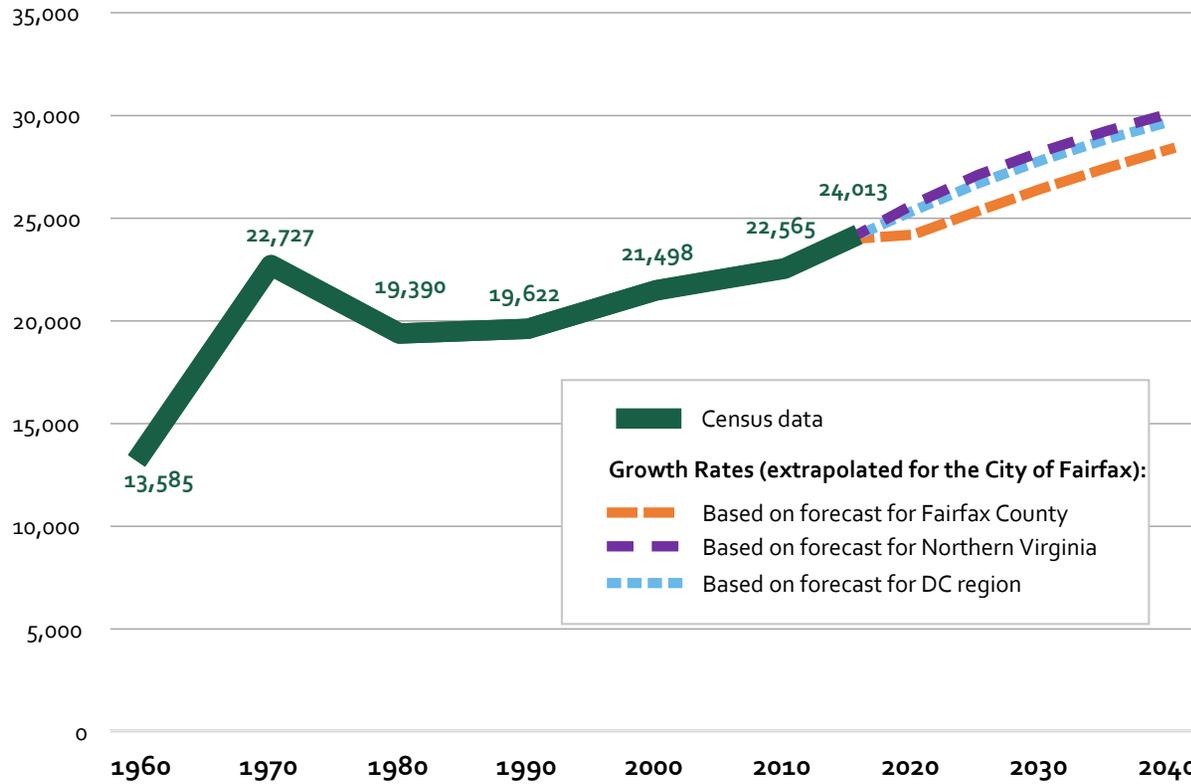
Today, the City is an independent jurisdiction of just over six square miles and a current population of around 24,000, located in the heart of Northern Virginia. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) forecasts an increase of 3,400 households in the City by 2035, as shown in Figure 1. The City strives to strike a balance

between maintaining the charm that residents currently enjoy and that makes it unique from surrounding communities while also guiding the growth and development projected for this metropolitan area.

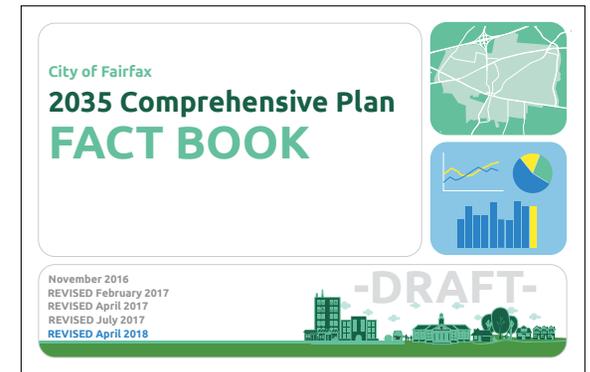


*Main Street Fairfax, 1905 - Winter view of Main Street with the Ratcliffe-Allison House on the right next to Town Hall, built only five years earlier, at the intersection with Mechanic Street (now University Drive).*

FIGURE 1 POPULATION HISTORY AND FORECASTS



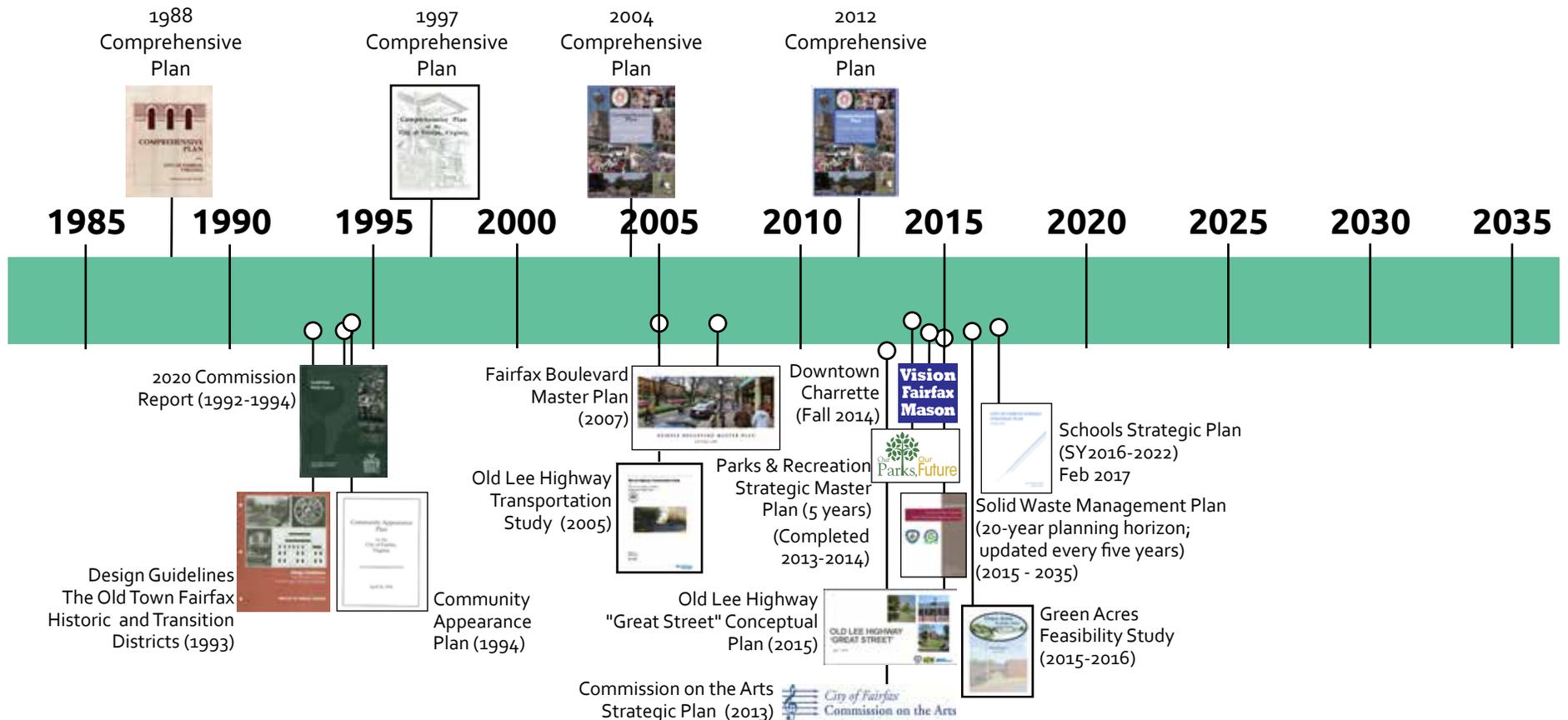
Source: US Census and MWCOG Round 8.4 Cooperative Forecasting: Population and Household Forecasts



For more information about the City's population, check out the **City of Fairfax Fact Book.**

The first comprehensive development plan for the City was adopted in June 1968, with amendments in 1971 and 1973. New plans were adopted in 1975, 1982, and 1988, with amendments in 1983, 1991, 1993, and 1997. City Council adopted the Comprehensive Plan's last major rewrite in July 2004. During the Comprehensive Plan's 2008-2011 review, the Planning Commission amended the existing plan, which was adopted in 2012. In addition to the Comprehensive Plan updates, many individual studies and plans have been completed over

the years as shown in the diagram below. This Comprehensive Plan incorporates and builds on many of the goals and strategies found in those studies as well as other plans and City policies not identified below.



## Structure of the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is a guide for the future growth of the City, focusing on community needs through 2035. Guidance and policy recommendations are provided through a vision, guiding principles, goals, outcomes, and actions, as described below.

- The **Vision** is the aspirational statement for the City in 2035;
- **Guiding Principles** are content-specific statements;
- **Goals** are general statements of the ideals toward which the City strives;
- **Outcomes** define what success looks like for each Goal; and
- **Actions** are the specific steps necessary to realize each Goal and Outcome.

The 14 Guiding Principles, as provided on pages 6-8, are categorized into five chapters: **Land Use, Multimodal Transportation, Environment and Sustainability, Economic Vitality, and Community Services**. Each topic is presented in a chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. Each chapter includes an introduction that provides background on the topic and a description of existing conditions, as well as opportunities and challenges facing the City that inform

some of the policies suggested through the Comprehensive Plan. Additional background information, Goals, Outcomes, and Actions are then provided for each Guiding Principle. Goals, Outcomes, and Actions, can also be found in the stand-alone Implementation Guide, which will be revised on a regular basis to track the City's progress on meeting its Goals.

This Comprehensive Plan is supported by two appendices:

- **Appendix A – Chesapeake Bay Preservation Plan** identifies and characterizes the City's water resources and addresses the effects of land use planning and development on water quality in accordance with the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act.
- **Appendix B - Transportation Practices and Policy** provides additional information on some of the more innovative practices discussed in the Multimodal Transportation Chapter.

**Supporting maps, graphs and figures are provided throughout this document.**

## What is a Comprehensive Plan?

- Document describing a community's vision for how it wants to physically grow and develop in the near future (10 to 20 years)
- Provides guidance on land use, transportation, housing, economic development, environment, public facilities, parks, arts, and historic preservation
- Policy document for decision-making that informs zoning and budget decisions, i.e., the Capital Improvement Program (the five-year plan for physical improvements in the City – facilities, infrastructure, etc.)

# VISION

In 2035, the City of Fairfax  
has a strong, sustainable economy  
that supports a vibrant 21st century community.



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In 2035, Fairfax is a city with...

...a close-knit community and a population that is diverse in its culture, demographics, and lifestyles, that capitalizes on its location in the center of the growing region and with easy access to the nation's capital.

Land Use



...inviting neighborhoods, each with its own unique character.



Neighborhoods

...a choice of housing types that meet the needs of our community.



Housing

...an economy that cultivates and promotes business success and entrepreneurial opportunities for large, small, and independent businesses and capitalizes on national, regional and intellectual partnerships.

Economic Vitality



## Commercial Corridors and Activity Centers



Photo Credit: Hord Coplan Macht

...flourishing centers of commercial and mixed-use activity that include an assortment of grocery stores, restaurants, cafes, entertainment venues, retail stores, offices, and housing.

...a thriving cultural arts program that supports a variety of special events, art spaces and performance venues.

## Cultural Arts



## Multimodal Transportation



...options for residents to easily, safely, and efficiently move within and between neighborhoods either by walking, bicycling, taking public transportation or driving.

## Community Design and Historic Preservation



...architecture that contributes to a vibrant, creative place and complements our historic character.

...inviting, well-maintained parks, trails, open spaces and multi-generational community centers.

## Parks and Recreation



## Education



...world-class community schools and a best-in-class education from preschool to post-high school that prepares students to be productive, responsible members of society, capable of competing in the global economy and motivated to pursue life-long learning.

...sustainable practices that preserve, conserve, reuse and recycle resources.

## Sustainability Initiatives



...a healthy ecosystem of naturally flowing streams, native plants, wildlife, contiguous natural habitat areas, and a healthy tree population.



## Natural Environment

## Government and Public Safety



...exceptional governmental, police and fire safety services.

...safe, well-maintained infrastructure and use of advanced technology.

## Infrastructure and Utilities



## Planning Process

Development of the Comprehensive Plan was based on a three-phase process beginning with information collection, followed by analysis and recommendations. Information collection included references to previous plans and studies that helped inform the Comprehensive Plan and input provided by members of the community, including residents, business owners, City Council, City boards and commissions, other stakeholders (George Mason University, Fairfax County, etc.), and City staff. During the information collection period, staff also developed the Fact Book, a summary of data on the City, from physical conditions to demographics and service analysis.

Based on the previous plans and studies referenced, input collected from the community, and data from the Fact Book, a series of goals and outcomes were developed for each of the content areas. These goals and outcomes were reviewed with the Planning Commission and City boards and commissions. The same process was followed to develop actions and metrics for the content areas. Goals, outcomes, actions and metrics for each

content area encompass the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan and provide the foundation for the overall document.

More specific data analysis was provided for the Land Use Strategies Guiding Principle, including a scenario analysis using Envision Tomorrow software. This provided a way to illustrate – with graphics and numbers – what the future could look like, given different development contexts, culminating in a public survey on potential development scenarios based on the results of the analysis. Along with the Scenario Analysis, survey results helped guide development of the Future Land Use Map.

Final revisions to the Comprehensive Plan were based on review by members of the community through public open houses, online forums, and Planning Commission and City Council meetings. The Comprehensive Plan was adopted by City Council on February 12, 2019 (R-19-03) after recommendation by the Planning Commission (PC-19-02).

The Multimodal Transportation Plan was prepared through a separate planning process parallel to this one, but with the intention of incorporating it into the Comprehensive Plan, with connections to land use, open space, housing, and economic development.



## Community Outreach

Community outreach played a vital role in the development of the Comprehensive Plan. Early public involvement guided all aspects of the Comprehensive Plan including issue and opportunity identification, as well as development of the vision, goals, and objectives. Providing the opportunity for public input encourages citizens to be invested in the future of their community and helps ensure that recommendations developed as part of the Comprehensive Plan are implemented and sustained over time.

Staff employed a diverse set of traditional and non-traditional outreach tools and strategies to ensure all stakeholders had an opportunity to contribute throughout the process.



## Community Surveys

The Center for Social Science Research (CSSR) at George Mason University worked with City staff to develop and administer a Community Survey to ask members of the community for feedback on issues of interest to formulate a vision, goals, and objectives for the Comprehensive Plan.

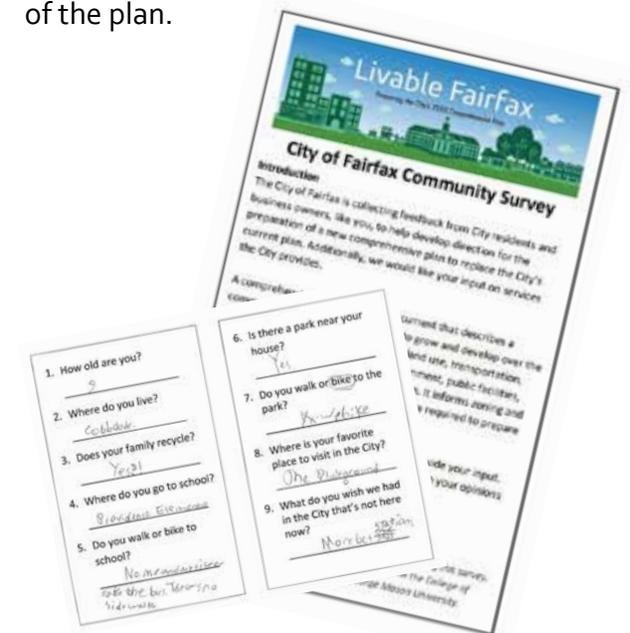
City residents and business owners were notified of the survey via postcards sent out in March 2016, which provided directions on how to take an online survey. Paper copies were also made available to those that requested them.

An overview of the results was presented at a public meeting on June 6 at the Sherwood Community Center, as well as at meetings of the City Council on June 14 and the Planning Commission on June 27, which were televised on Cityscreen-12. The full document detailing the process and analyzing the results was released on June 30, 2016.

CSSR sent out 9,943 postcards to City residences and businesses, and followed up with reminder calls. A total of 863 surveys were completed.

City staff also prepared a ten-question Kids' Survey that was distributed at Parks and Recreation events and to students at Daniels Run Elementary School, Providence Elementary School, Lanier Middle School, and Saint Leo the Great Catholic School. A total of 620 Kids' Surveys were completed. The ages of the students that completed the survey ranged from seven to thirteen.

Online Google surveys were also used to collect feedback on proposed future development scenarios, the future land use map, and drafts of the plan.



## Website and Social Media

Information about the Comprehensive Plan process, meetings, technical information, and opportunities to provide feedback were made available on the City's website. City staff created a page within the website devoted to the Comprehensive Plan, [www.fairfaxva.gov/livablefairfax](http://www.fairfaxva.gov/livablefairfax).

In addition to the website, City staff promoted meetings and information about the Comprehensive Plan through Facebook and Twitter. One of the many benefits of using social media for outreach is that it allowed staff to track how many people viewed what was shared and which posts performed the best.

Several of the presentations were shared live on Facebook and posted on the City's YouTube channel. Staff also created YouTube videos to advertise the community survey, which were shown on the City's government access television station, Cityscreen-12. Staff also created a welcome video for an open house to explain the comprehensive plan process.

## Printed Media

To ensure all members of the community were aware of the comprehensive plan process and opportunities to participate, articles were regularly included in the CityScene, the City's newsletter published monthly and mailed to all City businesses and residents. Seventeen articles related to the Comprehensive Plan have been posted in the CityScene since April 2016.

To reach an even broader audience for targeted events, ads were purchased in regional newspapers, The Fairfax Times and Fairfax Connection.

Other printed communications include postcards mailed to all residents and businesses and informational fliers handed out at City events and displayed at City facilities.

### CityScene Article

#### City Seeks Input on Vision for 2035 Comprehensive Plan

The City of Fairfax seeks community feedback on the draft vision statement for the 2035 Comprehensive Plan, culminating with a public comment period during the September 26 Planning Commission meeting. The Comprehensive Plan vision statement will provide guidance on how the city should grow and develop during the next 20 years. Information: 703-385-7930.

The draft vision statement is a series of statements related to each of the proposed content areas in the 2035 Comprehensive Plan: Land Use; Neighborhoods; Com-

mmercial Centers and Redevelopment Areas; Housing; Community Design and Historic Preservation; Transportation, Mobility and Connectivity; Natural Environment; Sustainability Initiatives; Business, Attractions, Recreation and Promotion; Education; Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts; Public Safety; Infrastructure and Utilities; and Implementation Strategy and Performance Metrics.

The vision statement is intended to describe Fairfax's values, aspirations and shared image of what the community as a whole

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## Public Meetings

The Planning Commission began discussions on preparing the Comprehensive Plan on Monday, October 26, 2015. Members of the public were encouraged to attend any of the regularly scheduled Planning Commission meetings to share thoughts or concerns about the Comprehensive Plan, even if it was not explicitly being discussed as part of the agenda.

In addition to presentations to the Planning Commission, staff presented briefings and solicited feedback at the regular meetings of other boards and commissions including the City of Fairfax School Board, Board of Architectural Review, Community Appearance Committee, Commission on the Arts, Fairfax Renaissance Housing Corporation, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Historic Fairfax City Inc., Economic Development Authority, Commission for Women, and the Environmental Sustainability Committee. The Planning Commission also hosted joint work sessions at The Civil War Interpretive Center at Historic Blenheim with the various boards and commissions to discuss specific topics of interest, and joint work sessions with the City Council.

## Community Events

### Open Houses

In addition to regularly scheduled public meetings, staff hosted many open houses at locations throughout the City, including the Stacy C. Sherwood Community Center, Old Town Hall, Lanier Middle School, and City Hall.



### Panel Discussion: Emerging Trends Shaping our Community

The City gathered a panel of experts and a moderator to talk about trends in housing, economic vitality, and community development as part of the effort to prepare the Comprehensive Plan. The discussion took place on Saturday, September 16, 2017 at the Sherwood Community Center.

The expert panel included Thomas Maskey, Jr., Principal of Potomac Development Group, who has dedicated 35 years to the development of retail shopping centers and is responsible for over 8 million square feet of development in the Washington, D.C. region, including landmark projects at Downtown Silver Spring, Washingtonian Center, Milestone Center, Fair Lakes Center, Fairfax Corner, Virginia Gateway, and National Harbor; Donald W. Knutson, President of the Knutson Companies, whose development projects include Downtown Brambleton and Crescent Place in Leesburg; and Michelle Krockner, Executive Director of the Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance. The discussion was moderated by Lisa Nisenson, an affiliated researcher with George Mason University's Center for Real Estate Entrepreneurship who leads Alta Planning + Design's New Mobility Group.



## City Events

City staff attended other events to engage and inform the public about the comprehensive planning process. Those events included:

- Chocolate Lovers Festival
- Scavenger Hunt on July 4
- Fall Festival
- Easter Egg Hunt
- Community Farmers Market
- Rock the Block
- Bike to Work Day

## Schools

Staff worked with the City of Fairfax School Board, Superintendent, and School principals to involve the City's students in the comprehensive planning process early and often. In addition to the Kids' Survey that was covered previously, staff made several presentations and had discussions with the students at Daniels Run Elementary School, Providence Elementary School, Lanier Middle School, Fairfax High School, and George Mason University. At the end of the 2017-2018 school year, representatives from the City's schools and from George Mason University presented their thoughts on the draft goals to the Planning Commission at public meetings. All City school students grades K through 12 were also encouraged to share their vision of Fairfax in 2035 through an art contest.



## Statutory Requirements

The comprehensive plan serves as a locality’s primary decision-making document for land use and development. It establishes the intent and goals of the community to influence development in both the private and public sectors and should be relied upon as an initial source that directs users to appropriate reports or strategic plans where necessary.

State law governing the development of a comprehensive plan (Section 15.2-2223 of the Code of Virginia) requires every county, city, and town to adopt a plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction. The Code further requires that comprehensive plans be reviewed every five years to ensure that the plan is responsive to current circumstances and that its goals continue to be supported by the citizenry; however, the City should consistently be prepared to make interim changes to the plan because necessary changes can result from the completion of strategic plans or changes to other City policies. The Planning Commission is tasked with preparing the plan and recommending it to the City Council for adoption.

The Code of Virginia includes both required and optional content for comprehensive plans. Required provisions relate to issues that are fundamental to the plan itself, such as long-range recommendations for development and methods of implementation. In order to address what are perceived as critical issues statewide, the Code of Virginia specifically requires that all comprehensive plans address both affordable housing and transportation infrastructure.

## Authority

While the Comprehensive Plan communicates a vision for future land use and development in the City, the zoning ordinance provides the regulatory mechanism to ensure that new development and changes in land uses are consistent with this vision. Section 15.2-2232 of the Virginia Code states that a comprehensive plan “shall control the general or approximate location, character and extent of each feature shown on the plan.” Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan is one of the approval considerations for zoning text amendments, zoning map amendments, special use permits, and special exceptions to the zoning ordinance.

Where any new development is proposed that requires a land use action not consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, the applicant should request a modification to the Comprehensive Plan as well, in order to keep the two documents consistent. Such modifications must be reviewed by the Planning Commission and approved by City Council. This provides flexibility for the Comprehensive Plan to adjust to market conditions and design trends, but ensures that any such changes are reviewed and considered within the greater context of the City’s vision.

In addition to guiding decisions on land use and development, the Comprehensive Plan includes guidance on investment for transportation and infrastructure. Section 15.2-2232 of the Code of Virginia requires that no public facilities – such as streets, parks, utilities, or public buildings – shall be approved or constructed unless deemed to be in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan by the Planning Commission. The Comprehensive Plan should be used as a reference for all land use and budget decisions. Any budget item in the Capital Improvement Plan should support at least one of the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

## Implementation

In addition to providing guidance on land use and budget decisions, the Comprehensive Plan includes numerous actions to be taken by the City or its affiliates in order to achieve the vision of the plan. A separate Implementation Guide has been developed in support of the Comprehensive Plan to track progress on implementation of these actions. This is accomplished through an implementation matrix that provides the lead responsibility, timeframe for initiation and timeframe for completion of each action. Where appropriate, performance metrics are listed for goals to provide a mechanism for determining whether the implemented actions are achieving the desired result.

The Implementation Guide is a separate document from the Comprehensive Plan because it is expected to be updated regularly as progress is made toward achieving each action. The lead responsibilities, timeframes and performance metrics are also subject to change as more information is obtained in support of specific actions.

