

REPORT OF THE FLUVANNA RURAL PRESERVATION ADVISORY GROUP

Revised October 14, 2025

Introduction/Purpose

The Rural Preservation Advisory Group's objective is to provide community input regarding revision of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan regarding preservation of the rural portions of the county. Whatever form the amended Plan takes, it is our desire that the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors ensure that it is fully implemented by passage of or updating of Strong, clear, and enforced zoning and subdivision ordinances; otherwise, the Plan has little meaning. The Comprehensive Plan is meant to be and should be the blueprint for the future of the county.

Fluvanna must plan for where this growth, especially residential growth, should occur.

Fluvanna citizens have for decades reaffirmed their unyielding desire to maintain Fluvanna's rural character. Fluvanna County's current mission statement:

"Fluvanna County is committed to providing an excellent quality of life for our citizens and businesses through the efficient delivery of core services and programs while preserving the unique identity and rural character of the County."

Therefore, the principal Vision that drives this 2045 Comprehensive Plan is maintaining Fluvanna County's rural character.

All areas of Fluvanna should respect the principle of retaining rural character, even the Community Planning Areas (CPAs). With development, appropriate buffering must be required when differing uses adjoin. Housing developments must be set back from roads and mature tree buffers preserved. Even Zion Crossroads, slated to be the most developed part of Fluvanna, must retain its rural character while expanding its services. As one of the primary gateways to Fluvanna, it should be enhanced to provide a scenic welcome to residents and tourists. The residents of the Rivanna CPA, with almost half of Fluvanna's population, actively seek to preserve open spaces, green infrastructure, and managed, sustainable growth that compliments existing rural and historic areas.

In the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, there are 12 chapters:

- Natural Environment
- Land Use and Community Design Environment
- Infrastructure
- Transportation

Economic Development
Historic Preservation
Parks and Recreation
Housing
Human Resources
Education
Public Safety
Financial Sustainability

Their integral relationships were considered in developing the strategies to meet the main objective.

Background and History

The Comprehensive Plan is meant to be the blueprint for the future of Fluvanna County. It is imperative that the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors ensure that it guides the creation, passage, implementation, and enforcement of updated, strong, clear zoning and subdivision ordinances tailored to Fluvanna County; otherwise, this Plan has little meaning. Those ordinances are paramount to the successful guidance and management of county growth and rural preservation. Fluvanna's Plan must continue to tie development to the natural environment and its protection, while emphasizing the need for sustainable and fiscally responsible development.

Previous iterations of the Comprehensive Plan have included the concept of clustered development (rural cluster subdivisions), which had been allowed by right in A-1, Agricultural Districts. It is now obvious that cluster development as implemented has failed and has, in reality, added a disproportionate amount of development in what is now termed our Rural Preservation Area. **In the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, the goal was to have only 30% of residential growth in our rural areas; however, from 2009 to 2019, 79% of that growth occurred in the Rural Preservation and Rural Residential Areas**

(https://www.fluvannacounty.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning_amp_zoning/page/5641/2019_dar_final_draft.pdf).

In November 2024, the Board of Supervisors removed rural cluster subdivisions as an allowed use in A-1, Agricultural Districts. Consequently, as of this writing, major subdivisions are not allowed in A-1. The only subdivisions currently allowed in A-1 are minor subdivisions (up to 5 lots divided from the parent tract) and family subdivisions.

Had this situation been allowed to continue, it would have invariably resulted in the building out of large parts of the county's rural landscape into suburban-type development. We would like to see our rural areas preserved by good planning and not be governed by changing conditions in the economy. Despite these outside limitations, a disproportionate amount of housing has been and is still going into our rural areas.

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In recent years, Lake Monticello, our largest community, has come close to build out so that there is little opportunity within it for new housing. It is estimated that in the Rivanna Community Planning Area, which includes Lake Monticello, there are approximately 250 undeveloped lots as of May 2025. That, of course, puts additional pressure not only on land near the Lake but also on land in our designated rural preservation area. Although recent census data show that the average age of the population of the Lake continues to decline, it continues to have a sizeable aging population whose future needs should be a central part of the planning process. As recent housing proposals around the Lake have illustrated, residents in the Lake continue to be concerned about the short- and long-term viability and capacity of its water and sewer systems (which are owned and operated by Aqua Virginia). County planners have also indicated to us that they recognize that the most crucial and restraining infrastructure in the Lake neighborhood is its road system, which is today a major commuting network and would be substantially overburdened with new dense development.

Objectives

Include community input while assisting planners and elected officials in ensuring that Fluvanna County's rural character, positive quality of life, agricultural and forestal production, water quality and quantity, natural resources, historic sites, and scenic vistas are protected and improved through good planning and clear, strong, and enforced zoning ordinances driven by the revised 2045 Comprehensive Plan.

To achieve this guiding Objective, we advocate the following strategies that illustrate the interconnected, comprehensive nature of the varied elements involved in the preservation of Fluvanna County's unique identity and rural character.

Infrastructure (water, sewer and roads)

We applaud the county for its effort to bring water to the Route 15 and Route 250 area of Zion Crossroads where our existing plan calls for growth. The water and wastewater systems from the Women's Prison will have a limited capacity. We are concerned that the ultimate provision of water at Zion from the James River will have little effect absent a central wastewater treatment system. We urge you to consider working with Louisa County, as we have done on so many other initiatives, to provide a joint wastewater treatment facility to meet the needs of our Comprehensive Plan. How does this relate to rural preservation? Our present Plan calls for development to be concentrated in the Zion Crossroads area. Without the infrastructure or incentives from our county to locate there, the pressure on the rural preservation area will not only continue but probably increase.

We are also enthusiastic about the plans for bringing a reliable source of water to the Fork Union area using the substantial funds provided by Dominion Energy with possible extensions in the future north on Route 15 to Carysbrook. The Columbia and Fork Union areas need water and wastewater infrastructure. We recognize that commercial development would then be attracted to that area, and we think that would be net plus for the county and its citizens. Coordination and consultation with the existing community in the village of Fork Union will be vital to its ultimate success.

Water resources must be linked to the question of land use and growth. Land use affects water both in quality and quantity.

The reality among Fluvanna citizens is that the preservation of land, water, the rural environment, historic sites, and our scenic resources can only be accomplished as a result of **good planning and effective, timely implementation of updated, strong, clear enforced zoning and subdivision ordinances ensuring that growth is directed to designated growth areas and that public infrastructure is related to that plan.**

Infrastructure Goal: Recognize that public water and sewer must drive location of residential growth in the county. In rural preservation and rural residential areas, water availability must be a primary factor to determine density of development as well as proximity of wells to each other.

Infrastructure Objectives:

1. Discourage extension of public utilities and other growth-inducing public facilities into the rural preservation and rural residential areas. Limit denser developments in the rural preservation area to those areas served by public utilities. Direct compatible growth to Fork Union and Zion Crossroads, where public water will be available, and Palmyra and Columbia as well.
2. Consider that water, both ground and surface, must be one of the central factors in planning future growth.
3. Locate wells in Rural Preservation and Rural Residential areas to avoid depletion of neighbors' groundwater by lowering the local water table.
4. Manage and protect the county's groundwater, river and stream resources. Recently, the Commonwealth of Virginia has questioned the amount of environmental damage created by installing and maintaining solar facilities, specifically about runoff affecting the Chesapeake Bay.
5. It should be noted that the Commonwealth of Virginia, the other five Bay states, and the District of Columbia have signed an agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency entitled the "Chesapeake Bay Clean Water Blueprint." Among other things, it mandates serious reductions in the amount of phosphorous, nitrogen and silt in all the Bay's tributaries with the objective of meeting these goals by 2025. Development in our rural areas would not only have a serious detrimental impact on the ability of Fluvanna County and the Commonwealth of Virginia to meet the Total Maximum Daily Load Standards (TMDLS) contained in the Blueprint but also potentially result in loss of groundwater and the purity of our streams.
6. Attempt to design public utility corridors to fit the topography.
7. Conduct water and wastewater studies as new development is requested and before that development is approved.
8. Limit development densities to ensure future development stays within the capacities of water and sewer systems.
9. Complete a Master Water and Sewer Plan. Identify sources for County long-term water needs, particularly for each of the CPAs.

Land Use and Preservation

We viewed land and land use from the perspective of the oft-stated desire to preserve the county's rural character. **Our vision is that land use will be the overriding issue for comprehensive planning in the next 25 years or so.** We need to change the concept of land use so that its relationship to water, air, agricultural and forestry production and quality of life will be the central focus of our planning. It will be an accepted reality among Fluvanna citizens that the preservation of land, water, the rural environment, historic sites and our scenic resources can only be retained as a result of good planning.

Land Use and Preservation Goal: Develop and implement zoning and subdivision ordinances that direct growth to designated growth areas in the county. Available public infrastructure is critically related to determination of the ordinances. Preserve and maintain the recreational viewshed.

Land Use and Preservation Objectives:

1. Make land use decisions and plans that are consistent with the overall goal of preserving open space and approve conversion of farmland to nonfarm use only if an overriding public need exists and the designated growth areas cannot accommodate the new use.
2. Direct growth, especially to five of the six Community Planning Areas: Zion Crossroads, Fork Union, Columbia, Scottsville, and Palmyra.
3. Avoid spot zoning and rezoning in the Rural Preservation and Rural Residential Areas.
4. Encourage and facilitate landowners to place their land under conservation easements or in agricultural/forestral districts. Assist local nonprofits in educating landowners and the public to the advantages of these programs.
5. Continue to support use-value taxation and other fiscal programs that help alleviate economic burdens on owners of land used for agriculture, horticulture, forestry or open space purposes and use land use planning to protect agricultural land from escalating assessments as a result of development pressures.
6. Collaborate with Fluvanna's extension agent to work with our rural landowners in order to optimally use farmland.
7. Consider small solar facilities (up to 2MW) as a form of income for rural landowners, potentially discouraging them from selling their land for development.
8. Include language in the ordinances to regulate data centers in the County.
9. Recognize conditions and restrictions in deeds and other legal documents and require developers and individuals to resolve all disputes involving all parties before any rezoning is considered.
10. Protect scenic views and vistas by encouraging the siting of new buildings in conformance with the existing topography and into the existing landscape and vegetation.
11. Mandate developers to minimize the visual impact of development through ordinances that require retaining natural features, such as mature trees and plants, avoiding excessive grading, minimizing impervious surfaces, preserving wildlife habitats, and limiting light and noise pollution.
12. Ensure the rezoning and subdivision ordinances adopted are clear, strong, enforced, and reflect the vision of the RPAG so that growth takes place in a controlled manner without

spreading into a sprawling pattern; have the RPAG continue to work in a collaborative status with the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors.

13. Give due consideration to neighbors and adjacent property owners in zoning and subdivision development decisions.
14. Adapt development to the existing topography and natural setting. Excessive grading, cutting, and filling is to be discouraged.
15. Focus planning efforts on key parcels which have potentially serious effects on adjacent properties, such as the 155-acre parcel opposite Pleasant Grove.
16. Keep river and stream corridors, especially floodplain and wetlands, undeveloped.
17. Create an Advisory Group to prepare architectural standards and to evaluate proposed new commercial and residential developments regarding styles and materials. Styles, materials, and structure height must protect the aesthetics of the land and reduce the environmental footprint of any new development. (pg.42, 2015 Comprehensive Plan).
18. Prohibit strip development and mandate limited access and internal access management in large scale commercial and industrial uses.
19. Hold developers accountable for the commitments made when property is rezoned or when developments are approved.
20. Ensure developers complete all parts of their applications.
21. Mandate unobtrusive signage in commercial and industrial uses to protect primary and secondary roadways.
22. Support adequate setbacks, vegetative buffering, and dark sky lighting.
23. Draft design guidelines for all commercial and industrial development.
24. Manage By-Right better by implementing rezoning where the developer specifically proffers the uses they plan to pursue.
25. Develop and implement a system of cash proffers, impact fees, level of service standards. (Explain what level of service standards is).
26. Review and acknowledge the numerous statements in the 2015 Comprehensive Plan that illustrate why an automatic "YES" is not appropriate in all rezoning requests and approval of all developments. Draft ordinances to support these statements).
27. Identify the potential tax impact for each proposed development or rezoning (new schools, social services, public safety, traffic, water and sewer, adjacent incompatible uses). This information must be available to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors prior to their vote.
28. Identify the geographic limits of a crossroads community by meeting with Rural Area residents.
29. Continue to discourage the proliferation of permanent and temporary advertising signs.
30. Limit development on critical slopes to maintain the balance between slope, soils, geology, and vegetation.
31. Hold developers responsible for failure to comply with ordinances and/or proffers through implementation of substantial monetary penalties.
32. Mandate low-impact development (LID) as an approach to site development and storm water management designed to mitigate development impacts to land, water, and air. LID

begins with the site planning process and is more sustainable than traditional development practices. (See 2015 Comprehensive Plan, page 23).

33. Continue to promote voluntary efforts by citizens and citizen groups to protect scenic resources (river clean up, trash pick-up, and recycling).
34. Negotiate proffers including specific material types and styles as part of the project's approval process.
35. Work to increase alternative transportation options such as Rideshare, park-and-ride locations, and a more flexible schedule for Jaunt to accommodate workers, the elderly, and the disabled to mitigate the effects of vehicle emissions.
36. Improve connectivity between Palmyra and Pleasant Grove and within Community Planning Areas to enable residents to travel safely without the need to use a vehicle (ex. – sidewalks and trails), as appropriate.
37. Continue to review and pursue opportunities and options for Palmyra Village streetscape projects consistent with its rural character. Do the same for Fork Union, Columbia, Zion Crossroads, and Scottsville.

Keeping Fluvanna's Rural Character

What is rural character? Rural character refers to the patterns of land use typified by open land and forests, *low population density*, and agricultural production. One can envision rural character as: farmhouses; barns; pastures; livestock; agricultural and forestal production; country stores; winding gravel roads; green spaces; wildlife; rivers and streams; starry nights; forests; tree lined gateways and highways; mountain views; orchards; vineyards; mills; locks; old school houses; log cabins; archeological sites; and country churches.

Once rural character is destroyed or lost, it is gone forever. It cannot be replaced.

Rural Character Goal: Create design ordinances that reflect the oft-stated desire of Fluvanna's citizens to retain and enhance our rural heritage. Our hope is that the following objectives would prevail in drafting new zoning and subdivision ordinances regarding growth in the designated Rural Preservation and Rural Residential Areas.

Rural Character Objectives:

1. Maximize the opportunity for continued preservation of farms, forests, historic sites, and open space to include preserving water quality in our streams and ground water resources; preserving wildlife habitat; limiting noise and light pollution; encouraging outdoor recreation and preserving the ability of farm and forest owners to profit from their enterprises.
2. Include in any proposed development a plan for retaining tree buffers and a plan for the landscaping of the development, including landscape buffers from the road and adjacent properties.
3. Encourage Low Impact Development.

4. Protect the county's scenic roadways by designating them as State Scenic Byways and by adopting a local scenic byways ordinance.
5. Develop a Greenway Plan for Fluvanna County for increased recreational and tourism opportunities, provide connections to key destination points and attractions. This plan would include parks, significant trails, local wineries and orchards, historic sites, scenic rivers and unique local businesses.
6. Work with residents in identified Rural Crossroads areas to develop a plan for their geographic boundaries and ideas for small businesses, programs and services utilizing existing structures (Kidd's Store, Cunningham, Palmyra, Kent's Store, Nahor, Fork Union, Columbia); reuse older buildings for the needs of citizens.
7. Mandate larger buffers (of at least 100 feet) between incompatible land uses and along our roads and the gateways to our county. Preserve, protect, and retain mature trees along our roads to retain our rural character and tree canopies. Any new commercial or housing developments must be behind green buffers or berms where trees do not already exist to retain the views along our rural roads. (Fluvanna County Code Section 22-24 – **Landscaping and Tree Protection**)
 - Inform, educate, and precisely define the **Landscaping and Tree Protection Plan** for all members of the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission.
 - Ensure all types of developers are informed of the **Landscaping and Tree Protection Plan**. Mandate the inclusion of specific tree protection strategies as part of the application, Master Concept Plan and Site Development Plan.
 - Enforce compliance with the **Landscaping and Tree Protection Plan** by following all the prescribed procedures and eliminating any potential options for developers to bypass the Plan to avoid compliance.
8. Develop scenic corridor regulations to preserve the scenic views along the gateways to Fluvanna County. (2015 Comprehensive Plan, page 63)
9. Slow the constant rezoning of A-1 land (9 to 12 months).
10. Require larger lot sizes in rural areas and in developments on rezoned A1 land, especially adjacent to incompatible uses.
11. Encourage the protection of farmland and forests from development that would reduce its long-term viability as a part of the agricultural economy, i.e., residential development, industrial development, data centers, and utility scale solar facilities.
12. Promote reuse of historic structures that support agricultural and forestal uses in the Rural Area.
13. Maintain the rural character and ensure the protection of current and future agricultural and forestal land as essential to preserving the heritage and unique character of Fluvanna County.

The Business of Development in Fluvanna

Goal: Require residential and/or business developers to adhere to additional requirements of county government.

Development Requirement Objectives:

1. Require new project to demonstrate the potential cost impact of a proposed development (cost implications for county staff and services).
2. Regarding any proposed redevelopment or rezoning, recognize conditions and restrictions in deeds and other legal documents and require developers and individuals to resolve all disputes involving all parties before any rezoning is considered.
3. Hold developers responsible for failure to comply with ordinances and/or proffers through implementation of substantial monetary penalties.
4. Support and promote specialty and niche farming such as equestrian uses.
5. Support local farmers markets with an emphasis on local products.
6. Encourage businesses and industries that support and strengthen the county's agricultural economy.
7. Promote farming as a productive way of life.
8. Reimagine and restore major celebrations of Fluvanna County related to history including oral history, music, and other related facets. Attempts should be made to include all areas and citizens, with outreach to youth groups and students.
9. Enhance and aggressively market a Fluvanna County brand aimed at attracting tourists and visitors through good planning and design.
10. Consider partnering with neighboring counties (i.e., Buckingham, Louisa, Goochland) by exploring opportunities to attract new compatible economic enterprises.
11. Encourage development of a "country store" at Pleasant Grove which showcases Fluvanna's musicians, artists, photographers, crafters, and writers where residents and tourists can enjoy the showcases in a comfortable setting along with the purchase of light refreshments including local artisanal foods.
12. Pursue marketing efforts, using digital technology to target the tourist/visitor market with the attractions this area has to offer, including tubing, hiking, biking, horseback riding, fishing, arts and crafts festivals, historic tours, and vineyards.
13. Explore the installation of boat ramps along the Rivanna and James Rivers to support additional recreation and tourism opportunities. Consider using the Water Treatment Plant to provide a shared access point for a boat ramp.
14. Continue Columbia area revitalization efforts.

Solar Energy Development

Solar facilities are an evolving subject of great interest and current discussion. In 2023 and 2024, the County established a working committee to study the potential impact of industrial/commercial solar facilities in the County and to provide clear, thorough recommendations to the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. As a result of the committee's work, the Board of Supervisors made two significant changes in late 2024: Utility-scale solar facilities (producing 2 MW or more of electricity) were removed as an allowed use in A-1 Agricultural Districts; and the Board established a new district, S-1 Solar, and developed underlying regulations for future utility-scale facilities. As the County considers any future changes to solar policy due to changes in technology and the possibility of new regulations from the State, the County should consider factors including

(but not limited to): the impact such installations could have on adjacent or nearby landscapes and/or historic properties; impacts on ground water and the environment in general, including runoff affecting the Chesapeake Bay; how well any environmental impact study prepared by a potential developer addresses potential environmental and economic harm in case of natural disaster or unforeseen consequences, the decommissioning process, and other factors; the short- and long-range impacts of such installations; and potential tax benefits to Fluvanna County and its citizens from any such solar installations.