

COUNTY OF WARREN



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Douglas P. Stanley
County Administrator

September 25, 2007

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Nimet Soliman
Assistant Town Manager for Community Development
Town of Front Royal
P.O. Box 1560
Front Royal, Virginia 22630

RE: Town Comprehensive Plan Update
Happy Creek Area

Dear Nimet:

I am writing on behalf of the Warren County Planning Commission to provide comments on the Town's proposed Comprehensive Plan update for the Happy Creek area.

Based on our review, we offer the following comments:

- **Page 27 - HC-TI2/ Page 56- LR-T9.** Provide interconnection from Happy Creek Knolls to Warren County High School/Hilda J. Barbour to allow for better traffic flow in the area. The plan includes connecting William Street to the roads serving the schools by 2015. Based on current traffic conditions, interconnection from William Street and the Happy Creek Knolls area is needed now. This would ease the pressure on the John Marshall Highway/Westminster Drive intersection.
- **Page 56 - LR-TI8.** Leach Run Parkway - Connection of Route 55 East to Happy Creek Road. The Commission feels that this is an important transportation link. We support the construction of a 2-lane Leach Run Parkway by 2015.
- **Page 57- LR-TI0.** Happy Creek Road - The plan calls for improvements to Happy Creek Road to Meadow Lane by 2015 and other improvements by 2025 based on plans approved by VDOT. Given the current building average of 247 new dwelling units (80 per year) in the Shenandoah Farms subdivision alone since July 1, 2004 and the potential for this rate of growth to continue, we would recommend that the Town look at improving safety and capacity issues before 2025.

- **Page 57 - LR-TI11.** Route 55 Widening - Widening of Route 55 East from the Town limits to the Linden Interchange (Route 79) is the County's top primary transportation priority and should be constructed ahead of any other projects. This was based on the jointly adopted 2020 Front Royal Area Transportation Plan. The Commission is concerned that the priority is not as high in the Town's proposed plan.
- **Page 38 - Policy #2.** The action strategies for the North East Planning Area identify this area to be "protected and retained for agriculture". This statement is not congruent with the County's adopted comprehensive plan which states, "To direct future development into an efficient and serviceable form that will preserve the County's predominately rural character." Two objectives to obtain this goal are:
 - Direct County development to areas contiguous with Front Royal or rural villages that are served or will be served with adequate public facilities such as roads, sewer, and water.
 - Limit future suburban sprawl in rural or agricultural areas where adequate public facilities do not exist or where their provision would not be cost-efficient.

What we end up with is a situation where the County is encouraging its highest density growth around the Town, including the Happy Creek area, while the Town is preserving it in an agricultural land use.

The Town's strategies are inconsistent with Section 15.2-2223.1 of the state code that was amended this year to require counties with populations in excess of 20,000 (and to encourage towns) to designate "urban development areas" centered around towns and/or areas with public water and sewer utilities and in which residential densities of at least four (4) units per acre are appropriate. Our comprehensive plan is now required to designate such an area (which may include this part of Town) sufficient to meet projected growth for the next 20-30 years.

The proposed plan also appears to be completely contradictory of the purposes and requirements of the Town's 1976 annexation of the area. The Town's petition for annexation indicated that the area would be developed "for the coordinated and harmonious development and growth of the community," including the extension of water lines, sewer lines, streets and avenues, and street lighting "as soon as practicable."

The Town's annexation ordinance indicated that the area encompassed by the proposed Comprehensive Plan revision "is to a large degree urban" with "demands for municipal facilities and services," and that the area would be for "a compact and contiguous urban community" with the rest of the Town.

The Town described the area as, "more characteristic of a municipality, as distinguished from 'country' and "as opposed to rural or vacant." Even the Annexation Decree, dated July 9, 1976, noted that the area "is adapted to town improvements and will be needed in the reasonably near future for development."

In short, while we appreciate the Town's desire in protecting the community's rural atmosphere, the rural or vacant designation in the proposed plan conflicts with state law, the County's Comprehensive Plan, the objectives and requirements of the last annexation, and good planning principles.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to you on your proposed comprehensive plan amendment. We can tell that a lot of effort has gone into the proposed revisions and agree with most of the plan recommendations other than those issues noted above. Please give those issues raised above your careful consideration.

Sincerely,



Douglas P. Stanley, AICP
County Administrator

DPS

cc: Warren County Board of Supervisors
Warren County Planning Commission
Paul Carroll, Director, Front Royal-Warren County EDA