

Prince William Times

February 10, 2022 | Vol. 21, No. 6 | www.princewilliamtimes.com | \$1.00

Covering Prince William County and surrounding communities, including Gainesville, Haymarket, Dumfries, Occoquan, Quantico and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park.



The end of the 'rural crescent'?



TIMES STAFF PHOTO

Prince William County's rural area, also known as the "rural crescent" is home to several small farms as well as large homes on narrow, 10-acre lots, like these on Hazelwood Drive.

County's comprehensive plan update proposes big changes for rural areas

By Daniel Berti
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Prince William County planners have revealed their long-awaited comprehensive plan update – a draft document that, if adopted by the Prince William Board of County Supervisors, will provide a blueprint for local land-use decisions for the next two decades.

Among the most significant changes outlined in the draft: the elimination of the county's rural area designation from the map, known to many as the "rural crescent."

For the last 24 years, the county has limited development in the designated rural area to one home per 10 acres and has mostly prohibited connections to the public sewer lines. The area known as the rural crescent comprises about 117,000 acres along the county's western boundaries. About 80,000 acres are privately owned. The rest are parts of the Manassas National Battlefield Park, the Conway Robinson Memorial State Forest, Prince



PHOTO BY ALFREDO PANAMENO

A donkey in a pasture in a small farm along Aden Road, located in the county's rural crescent.

William Forest Park and Marine Corps Base Quantico.

The county's draft map, released Wednesday, Feb. 2, proposes replacing the privately owned land in the rural area with a new "agricultural and forestry" designation that would double the number of homes that could be built there. As proposed, the new plan could effectively upzone the area to one home per 5 acres.

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Superintendent pitches 7% raises for teachers, staff

Budget boosts overall spending 14%

By Daniel Berti
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Prince William County schools Superintendent LaTanya McDade is proposing a significant boost in spending for county schools next year that, if enacted, would bring per-pupil spending in the county to its highest level since 2009 when adjusted for inflation.

McDade's proposed budget totals \$1.5 billion in spending for fiscal year 2023. That's an increase of about \$173.1 million or 14% over the current year budget. The spending plan includes \$61 million to provide teachers and staff with an average 7% pay raise. The boost includes a step increase and a 4.2% cost of living increase.



Superintendent
LaTanya McDade

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Va. Senate moves to allow parents to decide on masks

By Jill Palermo
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Virginia's ongoing debate about masks in public schools – and who should decide whether students and staff must wear them – took a surprising turn Tuesday when the Democratic-controlled state Senate approved a measure giving parents the power to decide whether their children don masks on school property.

The move came in an amendment to an existing state law sponsored by state Sen. Chap Petersen, D-34th, of Fairfax County, and was approved in a bipartisan 29-9 vote with 10 Demo-

crats joining the chamber's 19 Republicans in voting in favor.

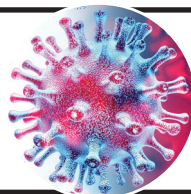
Three state senators representing parts of Prince William County cast supporting votes, including Democratic Sens. John Bell (13th) and Scott Surovell (36th) and Republican Richard Stuart (28th).

Sen. George Barker, D-39th, voted against the amendment, while Sen. Jeremy McPike, D-29th, said in an interview Tuesday he missed the vote because he had to step out of the chamber. Still, McPike said he opposes the amendment as

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RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMER



Local COVID-19 update: State reports 35 more local deaths
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Human Rights Awards: County honors 7 for their good works
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The end of the ‘rural crescent’?

RURAL, from page 1

Prince William County Long Range Land Use Planner David McGettigan confirmed in an interview Thursday, Feb. 3 that the county’s proposed new land-use map eliminates the rural area and the rural area boundary entirely.

“It’s a major update,” to the comprehensive plan, McGettigan said.

New designations

In all, McGettigan said around 75,000 acres will fall under the new “agricultural and forestry” designation, and another 5,100 acres would be replanned for even higher residential densities under three new “rural place types.” Those designations are: “village mixed use,” “hamlet mixed use” and “conservation residential.”

The “conservation residential” designation would allow for clustered home developments with up to one home per 2 acres if 60% of a developments total acreage is placed in a permanent conservation easement. As proposed, the designation would comprise roughly 3,500 acres of what is currently the rural area.

Areas proposed for conservation residential roughly align with requests made by individual rural landowners who told the county earlier this year they intended to sell their land to developers, including Dale House, who recently closed his Dutch Land Farms in Nokesville, and Brad Smith, who owns Smith Family Farms in Gainesville.

Another 1,600 acres in the rural area would be reimagined as “hamlet mixed use” and “village mixed use” districts to allow increased residential densities and commercial uses in areas that have “their own distinct character,” according to the proposed map. Areas that would be replanned under those designations are Nokesville, Greenwich, Woolsey, Catharpin and historic Brentsville.

Hamlet mixed use districts would allow up to one home per 2 acres, while “village mixed use” districts would allow up to four houses per acre, including townhouses.

The changes, if approved, would alter only the county’s long-range planning map, known as the comprehensive plan. Any specific devel-

opment that proposes more homes in the rural area above the current limits will still require a separate rezoning application approved by the board of county supervisors, McGettigan said.

The county’s draft land-use chapter was created by county planners and an independent firm hired by the county to assist in the update. McGettigan said the planning office consulted all eight county supervisors to solicit their input as they began updating the land use chapter – but he said none of the supervisors specifically requested eliminating the rural area designation from the map.

McGettigan said the decision to allow increased housing density in the rural area was primarily prompted by a housing analysis of the county conducted by RKG Associates, a Washington D.C.-based economic planning firm, in 2021. The analysis found that the county’s ongoing housing shortage, widely blamed for driving up housing costs across the county, could persist for decades if the county does not open additional land for development.

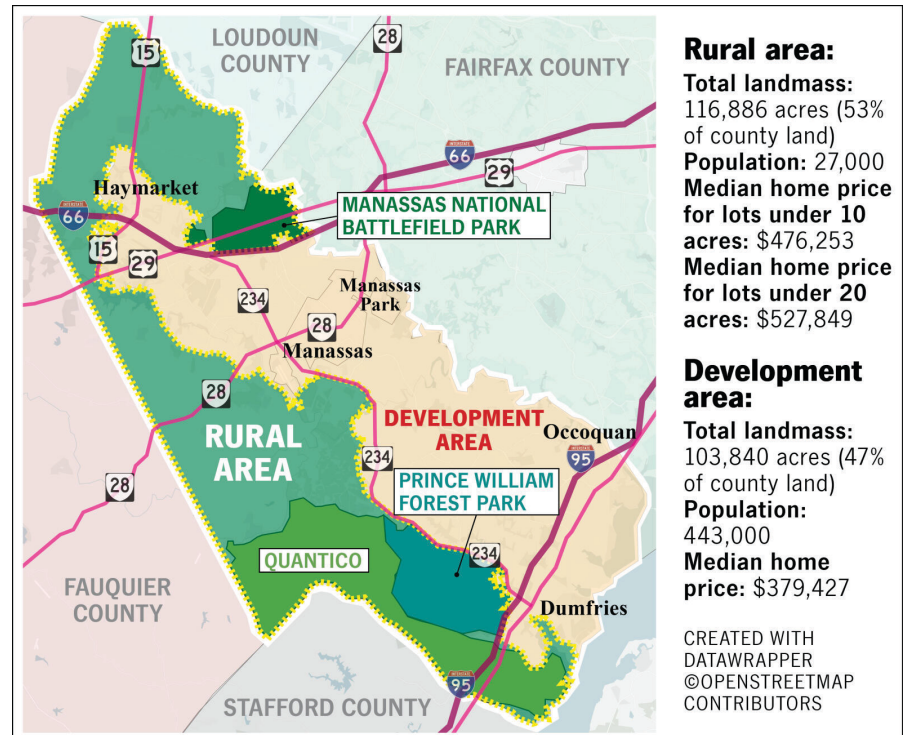
The report found the “rural crescent” designation to be “antithetical” to the county’s affordable housing goals.

The county’s population has rapidly grown since the rural area was created by the board of county supervisors in 1998, adding more than 210,000 new residents. But the vast majority of new residents have moved to the county’s “development area” because housing in the rural area is intentionally restricted.

“There is a need for more supply, and our current comprehensive plan doesn’t meet our needs,” McGettigan said. “We’ve run out of land for housing.”

The county’s draft of the updated land-use chapter was published for the first time Feb. 2, but it is already being criticized by local civic and environmental groups The Coalition to Protect Prince William County and the Prince William Conservation Alliance. Both organizations have fought for years to preserve the “rural crescent” in its current form.

Elena Schlossberg-Kunkel, executive director of The Coalition, said she was “shocked” to see the extent



of the changes being proposed in the updated comprehensive plan, adding that the county’s proposals were not a reflection of community voices in the rural area.

“They don’t know what they’re doing,” Schlossberg said. “Everybody should be scared s---less.”

Kim Hosen, executive director of the Prince William Conservation Alliance, and Schlossberg-Kunkel both said they believe the changes will increase suburban sprawl in Prince William County, causing more traffic and the need for road-widenings and other infrastructure improvements that could be a burden on the county’s budget.

“For over 20 years, the rural crescent has been the county’s best tool to combat sprawl development. The haphazard proposals we’re looking at now will take that tool out of the toolbox,” Hosen said.

The county’s “rural crescent” was created in 1998 with the intention of slowing the county’s growth. It was a highly contentious land-use decision that was most vociferously opposed by county supervisors representing the areas that would be most impacted by it – the Gainesville and Brentsville districts.

At the time of its creation, former county attorney Sharon Pandek claimed the “rural crescent” would slow the county’s already fast-growing population, reducing the 20-year

projected population from 475,000 to 391,000 – a prediction that did not come to fruition.

Higher density development proposed outside the rural area

The changes to the rural area are only one piece of the comprehensive plan land use update.

Within the development area, planners are proposing significant changes that would reimagine 10 areas of the county: Dumfries; Haymarket; Liberia Avenue at Prince William Parkway; mid-county area near the fairgrounds; Potomac Mills; Sudley Road at Interstate 66; the U.S. 1 corridor; Bethlehem Road and Yorkshire.

The update would allow for higher residential densities, new commercial and industrial areas and mixed-use development in some or all of those areas.

The county’s land-use chapter update is expected to reach the Prince William County Planning Commission and the Board of County Supervisors as soon as May.

The planning office will be hosting an in-person community meeting on the Pathway to 2040 Comprehensive Plan Update on Thursday, Feb. 10 at the Beacon Hall Conference Center on the George Mason University SciTech Campus in Manassas.

Reach Daniel Berti at dberti@fauquier.com

POLICE BRIEFS

Elderly Dale City man dies in house fire

An 83-year-old man has died from injuries he suffered last week in a fire at his Dale City home that officials say was electrical in nature and accidental, according to Prince William County Fire and Rescue Department officials.

Mohammad Bashir Kahn, 83, died on Sunday, Feb. 6, at the Washington Hospital Center. Kahn was rescued from his burning home, located in the 4000 block of Montega Drive in Dale City, after firefighters arrived at about 11:24 a.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 1, and found the single-family home with heavy fire and

smoke, according to Prince William County Assistant Fire Chief Matt Smolsky.

Firefighters found and rescued Kahn, the only person home at the time of the fire, and immediately began administering life-saving care, Smolsky said in an earlier news release.

Kahn was transported to a regional burn unit via helicopter. His cause of death has not yet been determined, Smolsky said.

A total of six adults and one child were displaced by the fire, Smolsky said.

Suspect named in Manassas shooting injuring 2

Prince William County police are looking for a 39-year-old Manassas man in connection with a Jan. 23 shooting outside a Yorkshire area restaurant that left two people injured.

Two men, a 22-year-old and a 32-year-old, were treated for gunshot wounds at an area hospital following the shooting, which began outside the La Isla restaurant, located at 8699 Parkland St. in the Yorkshire area of Manassas.

On Sunday, Feb. 6, police released the name and photo of a suspect whom detectives identified through surveillance footage taken from the restaurant, according to 1st Sgt. Jona-

than Perok, spokesman for the Prince William County Police Department.

Following the investigation, detectives obtained arrest warrants for Wilder Miguel Cordero Miranda, 39, of the 7300 block of Rokeby Drive, in Manassas.

Cordero Miranda is described as a Hispanic male, 5 feet 9 inches tall and weighing 170 pounds with black hair and brown eyes.

Anyone with information about the shooting or Cordero Miranda’s whereabouts is asked to contact the Prince William County Police Department tip line at 703-792-7000 or submit a web tip to pwcva.gov/policetip.