

Members of the Stakeholder Committee:

On behalf of the Loudoun Chamber's 1,250 members, I would like to thank you for all the work and time you have put in to updating Loudoun County's Comprehensive Plan. Your dedication and service to the County has not gone unnoticed, and is greatly appreciated.

It is my privilege to offer, for your consideration and benefit, the Loudoun Chamber's perspective on the draft Envision Loudoun plan document.

These comments are prefaced by the fact that our members firmly believe Loudoun's revised Comprehensive Plan must truly reflect the County's shared vision for the growth, economic prosperity and quality of life for all residents, employees and visitors.

While all aspects of the draft Comprehensive Plan will determine Loudoun's ability to achieve the economic vitality and quality of life outcomes we desire, there are four main chapters that will have the greatest impact: Economic Development, Housing, Land Use, and Transportation.

Economic Development

Loudoun is a world class place in which to live, work and play, and that is because of our strong business climate and County policies that value businesses and their investments in our community. It must remain Loudoun's top priority to make our County a welcoming destination for commercial investments, business expansion and job growth, while ensuring the fruits of prosperity are enjoyed by every citizen.

That is why every aspect of the Envision Loudoun plan must continue and improve on the County's customer-focused approach that views businesses as partners in Loudoun's success.

It is also why the Envision Loudoun plan must advance County policies that will diversify our economy by focusing on industries aligned with Loudoun's strengths, including technology, aerospace, health innovation, aviation, data centers, tourism and agriculture.

Loudoun's most valuable economic asset is its skilled workforce. Envision Loudoun must prioritize workforce development, including through education and training resources. The plan must also address the housing, transportation and economic conditions that attract and retain a talented workforce.

Additionally, Loudoun's rural businesses define our community's unique character and provide a competitive advantage in attracting talent and commercial investment. County policies must view the rural economy and rural businesses as job and tax creating treasures to be nurtured, not as intrusions.

Housing

The supply, diversity and availability of housing options for Loudoun's workforce – particularly those in the public sector, service and hospitality industries and at the earliest career stages - will drive the success of our County's transportation and economic development strategies.

There is no doubt: Loudoun is suffering from a housing affordability crisis that is hurting the youngest and less wealthy members of our workforce. Estimates are that 30% of all Loudoun households are “cost burdened,” spending more than 30% of their income on housing. Limited housing supply is making this situation worse by driving up costs.

The County’s own analysis shows that by the year 2040, Loudoun’s current plans would leave the County 19,000 housing units short to serve our workforce needs.

The County must make housing diversity and affordability a top priority. Loudoun needs a County Housing Plan to address need for market rate, workforce housing, and further invest in Housing Fund to support local projects to serve younger and low-income workers.

Loudoun needs a housing strategy that supports our children. After investing millions in public education, we need housing that will allow our students and our investment in their education to remain here in Loudoun. Government led solutions are needed, and so are private sector solutions that can be leveraged through better land-use and zoning policies/incentives.

Transportation

Loudoun County is attracting new jobs, residents and commercial investment because this is a world class community in which to live and do business. This growth does challenge Loudoun’s existing our infrastructure. Loudoun needs a transportation network supportive of the County’s vision to support economic development, create vibrant, safe communities and public spaces, and protect natural resources.

Because Loudoun’s economy depends on our businesses having access to a workforce, customers and suppliers, the Envision Loudoun plan must begin to address the constant gridlock on Routes 15, 9 and 50, while envisioning new connections to Maryland and Prince William.

Within Loudoun, our community’s investment in Metro’s Silver Line must be supported with improved roadway access to our new train stations, as well as other top employment and activity centers, including Dulles Airport.

Land Use

Appropriate land use planning must take place in Loudoun County to maximize the opportunities for development for housing and commercial use.

Businesses and economies need the right conditions to grow. Loudoun’s land use policies must allow for creative, flexible and market-aware thinking that is needed to create great places and communities where businesses and employees want to be located.

Urban Policy Areas: The Chamber is strongly supportive of the proposed Urban Policy Areas that take advantage of transit-oriented, mixed-use development principles around Metrorail stations and other transportation assets. Compact urban style development at future Metrorail stations and at other transit-accessible locations support the County’s economic development objectives, particularly if these areas are designed to provide a diverse choice

housing types and sizes for workers and residents with varying income levels. Urban-style activity centers can also help reduce automobile use when they incorporate safe transit, pedestrian and bicycle options.

Flexibility: The Chamber also supports the plan's call for the more creative, flexible and market-aware thinking that is needed to create great places and communities where businesses and employees want to locate. A flexible, market-aware approach should include streamlined land use approval processes to allow for flexible and timely responses to evolving market conditions and technological innovation.

Housing: Loudoun's land use policies must work to expand housing choices for the entire workforce and to make it easier for businesses to locate, operate, and grow in our County. We must provide a full spectrum of housing and employment options to support commercial, entertainment, educational, agricultural, and recreational activity.

The Chamber also advocates that Loudoun County conduct a regular and thorough review of its Comprehensive Plan at least every 4-5 years. Doing so will provide maximum flexibility to allow landowners and other businesses to adapt to changing market and economic conditions.

Again, thank you for all the work that has been put into this process so far, and thank you for accepting input from the general public. The Loudoun Chamber looks forward to seeing the revised draft after the public comments have been incorporated.

Sincerely,

Eric C. Johnson
Loudoun Chamber
Government Relations Manager