

## COMMUNITY DESIGN

### Intent

An attractive, well-designed County will attract quality development, instill civic pride, improve the visual character of the community, and create a strong, positive image for Prince William County within the region and the nation. *High-quality architecture and urban design – the result of high standards for architecture and site design* – will enhance the character of the County, its important natural land features, and its non-residential areas. High-quality architecture and site design standards will also assist the County in its efforts to attract and retain significant, non-retail economic development.

The intent of the Community Design Plan is to present illustrative guidelines for the effective and efficient design of new residential, commercial, employment, and mixed-use developments and for the redevelopment of existing areas within the County. The Plan applies to both public and private development projects. It should be used by citizens, developers, and public officials in the decision-making process for applications for rezonings, special use permits, public facility reviews, and Comprehensive Plan amendments, as well as for administrative consideration of site and subdivision plans.

The Community Design Plan contains the goals of community design, specific policies, and action strategies that encourage innovation and imagination in building design and site planning, while ensuring that certain universal principles of good community design are upheld. Certain action strategies advocate changes to existing site development ordinances and standards – in an effort to achieve alternative compliance or a new standard and to foster better, more creative, and more sustainable building and site designs. Other action strategies address ways in which the visual quality of County gateways and major travel corridors can be upgraded.

The Community Design Plan is supplemented by guidelines that illustrate certain policies and action strategies contained in this chapter and approved by the Board of County Supervisors. The first is the *Illustrative Design Guidelines for Office Development*. The second is *Illustrative Gateway/Corridor Design Guidelines*. Both documents outline the general characteristics of the high-quality development the County seeks.

As needed, guidelines shall be updated and supplemented with appropriate examples of building and/or site design or other site features that meet the goals and policies of this chapter.

**GOAL:** Provide quality development and a quality visual environment throughout Prince William County for residents, businesses, and visitors.

**GOAL:** Create livable and attractive communities

**DES-POLICY 1:** Encourage site, architectural, signage, and landscape designs that complement the scale and character of existing and planned development in the Development Area and in the Rural Area.

### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Require generalized development plans and master zoning plans – submitted with applications for rezonings, special use permits, and, where appropriate, public facility reviews – to include architectural, sign, lighting, and landscape concepts for all developments. In addition, proposed layouts and architectural elevations for all non-residential projects should be provided. Employ the *Illustrative Design Guidelines for Office Development* and the *Illustrative Gateway/Corridor Design Guidelines*, provided as supplements to this chapter, as illustrative examples of the high-quality development the County seeks.
2. For those portions of the Development Area that have been targeted for redevelopment/revitalization – or where such activity is occurring – retain some flexibility in applying illustrative design guidelines.
3. Ensure that signs are compatible in design, scale, material, style, and color with other site amenities, with buildings and landscaping, and with both the overall design character of the development in question and any adjacent development.
4. Ensure that signs for individual uses in mixed-use developments are designed and installed consistent with a development-wide sign program.
5. Encourage the development of a hierarchy of appropriately scaled entry and directional signs.
6. Encourage the incorporation of signs into a development's landscape plans – such as through the use of trees and shrubs to integrate signs into the landscape.
7. Review the old Highway Corridor Overlay District (HCOD) buffers created prior to February 20, 1996 and classified per HCOD length. Add requirements to these regulations for compliance upon development or redevelopment within these HCODs.
8. Periodically review the illustrative design guidelines referenced in this chapter and keep these guidelines and graphics current.

**DES-POLICY 2:** Encourage site, building, and landscape designs that result in the creation of safe and accessible pedestrian circulation and community open space.

**ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Encourage the provision of public open spaces and facilities in new developments and locate them close to active uses – commercial, community services, employment, and schools.
2. Encourage the provision of pedestrian links between and among commercial properties, community facilities, and nearby residential neighborhoods.
3. Encourage the clear delineation of pedestrian ways in commercial parking lots and other thoroughfares for public use – through the use of landscaping, lighting, signage, contrasting pavement, pavement marking, or other innovative treatments.
4. Encourage the provision of wider-than-required sidewalks in non-residential areas with high levels of pedestrian activity and ensure that buildings along main streets in town centers are oriented with their fronts adjacent to the sidewalk with parking in the rear.

**DES-POLICY 3:** Encourage the use of ridesharing, transit, and other mass transportation through the design of comfortable, safe, and conveniently located facilities.

**ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Encourage, through community design, the orientation of development to ridesharing, transit, bus, or other mass transportation.
2. Develop design standards for new transportation-related facilities that ensure the creation of safe, comfortable, and attractive places.
3. Provide shelters and route information at bus stops and park-and-ride lots.

**DES-POLICY 4:** Upgrade the visual quality of County gateways and major travel corridors.**ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Encourage private developers and public agencies – such as the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) – to provide landscape treatments and appropriate signage and lighting, to improve the scenic quality of highly visible areas along interstate and regional highways and major County thoroughfares – including along County-designated HCODs – at each of the County’s major gateways, in general accordance with the *Illustrative Gateway/Corridor Design Guidelines*.
2. Prepare illustrative design guidelines for the I-66 gateway at the east end, entering Prince William County from Fairfax County and add to the *Illustrative Gateway/Corridor Design Guidelines*.
3. Prepare – in cooperation with Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the private sector, and with plans submitted with applications for rezonings, special use permits, and public facility reviews – landscape plans to improve the scenic quality of highly visible areas along interstate and regional highways and major County thoroughfares, particularly where there are sound walls or along County-designated HCODs.
4. Use indigenous, drought-tolerant plant species for gateway and roadside landscape improvements.
5. Use wildflowers, meadow plantings, and reforestation at gateways and along major travel corridors.
6. Seek grant funding to support forest preservation and reforestation programs for County-owned properties and land within public rights-of-way.
7. Develop projects that will continue to add six linear street miles into the street tree program annually.

**DES-POLICY 5:** Establish a hierarchy of community streets with appropriately designed streetscapes.**ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Reinforce the hierarchy of streets, through the use of trees, shrubs, ground covers, lighting, and signage that are scaled appropriately to the street’s width and function; in the case of landscaping through the use of evenly spaced street trees adjacent to the street, landscaped focal points at entrances and at the end of streets, with the most intense landscaping along the entrance roads with less on the secondary roads.

2. Facilitate the location of utility easements within public rights-of-way, and the collocation of utilities within easements, through County coordination with VDOT and local utility companies. Ensure that utility easements and light poles are located so as to not conflict with the landscaping plan or the planting of trees.

**DES-POLICY 6:** Incorporate the Community Design Plan into the County's development application review and approval processes.

#### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Require development proposed under rezonings, special use permits, Comprehensive Plan amendments, and public facility reviews, when appropriate, to address the principles and standards of the Community Design Guidelines.

**DES-POLICY 7:** Encourage the development of well-functioning residential and commercial areas, and the improvement and enhancement of existing residential and commercial areas.

#### **ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Prepare – in conjunction with development proposals and in coordination with the private sector – design guidelines that address landscaping, lighting, street furniture, and signage for the County's existing commercial areas.
2. Locate, when appropriate, new public buildings and associated public space within mixed-use developments – such as in the 2002 Government Center Sector Plan Area, and in the Development Area in general – to encourage economically viable, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use community centers.
3. Encourage consolidation, undergrounding, or relocation and public or private financing plans to reasonably minimize the negative visual impact of overhead utilities. The plans should include strategies to encourage the participation of property owners.
4. Encourage the consolidation of access points and reconfigure internal circulation drives to improve vehicular and traffic safety, in a manner that does not cause internal congestion. Where appropriate and where such connections will not cause internal congestion, encourage the creation of interparcel connections to permit vehicular movement between adjacent commercial properties.
5. Encourage the provision of shelter for pedestrians, complementary building designs (including pad sites), clearly designated building entries, integrated signage (with complementary materials, lettering, color, and complementary lighting) in the design/re-design of building facades visible from public ways.
6. Encourage the provision of outdoor dining in commercial areas adjacent to eating establishments.

**DES-POLICY 8:** Encourage, in appropriate locations, the orientation of new structures towards adjacent rights-of-way, to create well-defined public streets and spaces.

**ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Encourage the placement of a portion of the required parking in the rear of commercial buildings, with provision made for convenient and well-defined access from that parking to the building(s) it serves.
2. Encourage the location of new buildings close to the street, to minimize the scale of new arterial and collector streets.
3. Discourage the location of large expanses of parking between public streets and building entrances.
4. Encourage structured parking to minimize the parking footprint.

**DES-POLICY 9:** Preserve and enhance the unique architectural and landscape qualities of the County's rural area.

**ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Encourage commercial development in the Rural Area to provide design compatibility between new and existing development. When there is more than one building on a site, design new commercial structures as a cluster of small-scale buildings to minimize their mass and to blend them in with existing buildings.
2. Use appropriate indigenous plant materials and traditional planting patterns in areas visible from public thoroughfares so that new buildings blend into their landscape surroundings.
3. Provide site plans and building designs that protect the existing visual quality and natural resource values that make these areas distinctive.
4. Encourage any new development in the Rural Area to preserve the visual character of the rural landscape by providing appropriate building setbacks, with landscaped/preserved open space occupying the setback area; and preserving important scenic resources—hedgerows, mature trees, farm buildings, walls and fences, and open fields.

**DES-POLICY 10:** Encourage site plans and building designs for new development that enhance the settings of the County Registered Historic Sites, as identified in the Cultural Resources Plan.

**ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Design projects to mitigate the adverse effects of development on the architectural and landscape features of archaeological and historic sites and structures when developing properties or adjacent properties.
2. Encourage the preservation of views to and from historic properties through the protection of farm fields, meadows, and woodlands.
3. Incorporate adaptive reuse of historic structures into new developments, rather than demolition, and provide sufficient land around archaeological and historic sites and structures to preserve the integrity of the site in the historic context.

**DES-POLICY 11:** Encourage innovative approaches to stormwater management.

**ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Encourage the use of natural stormwater management designs, such as wet ponds, as opposed to dry detention ponds. Where appropriate, develop systems that function as extensions of a site's natural drainage properties.
2. Encourage innovative design and landscaping of dry detention ponds.
3. Encourage the design and construction of regional stormwater wet ponds, if allowed by federal regulations. Where appropriate, encourage the provision of these regional facilities as extensions of the County's public/private open space network.
4. Encourage the use of stormwater facilities as architectural features of new development.
5. Encourage minimizing the amount of impervious surfaces in new development through the use of appropriate low maintenance pervious paving, and the removal of paved areas in existing developments, where applicable, to minimize runoff.

**DES-POLICY-12:** Fit new development into the natural landforms, particularly the existing woodland areas of the County.

**ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Recognize existing woodland areas as important features for protecting water quality, contributing to the overall beauty of the County, and promoting ecological diversity. Preserve and protect the natural terrain, drainage, and woodland areas in new development in accordance with EN-Policy 4, AS-1 and 2 of the Environment Plan. Preserve historic and champion trees and other specimen trees in cooperation with the County Arborist.
2. Encourage the integration of public open space areas with that of neighboring properties, to avoid fragmentation of open spaces and natural areas.
3. Minimize clearing and cut-and-fill operations. Encourage the placement of buildings so as to minimize the need for excessive grading. Avoid disturbance of steep slopes, particularly up-slope of important natural resource areas, such as perennial streams.
4. Align new roads to follow the natural contours of the land. Incorporate into the DCSM road standards that will allow greater preservation of the natural terrain and woodland areas.
5. Encourage the preservation of existing natural woodland strips of 50 feet in width and greater along collector and higher classification streets to screen views of parking lots and building rears, to maintain a more uniform and continuous streetscape edge along a roadway corridor, and to blend development in with the natural setting of the surrounding areas.

**DES-POLICY 13:** Encourage the preparation of plans for the preservation and restoration of landscape resources.

**ACTION STRATEGIES:**

1. Encourage re-vegetation that employs appropriate indigenous species and the restoration of natural landscape features, to mitigate the negative impact of development on native plant and animal communities.
2. Encourage re-establishment of the forest edge – where clearing of forested areas is required – through the installation of appropriate edge and understory species.
3. Encourage eradication or control of exotic nuisance plant species, where appropriate.

## NATURAL VIEWSHEDS POLICIES AND ACTION STRATEGIES

**DES-POLICY 14:** Identify significant natural viewsheds in Prince William County.

### ACTION STRATEGIES:

1. Seek funding from federal, state, local, and private organizations in order to secure professional services needed to conduct a Countywide or area-specific viewshed inventory or study.
2. Develop an incentive system for the preservation of viewsheds.
3. Determine whether it is desirable to establish viewshed overlay districts in the County.

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