

Testimony before the Loudoun County Planning Commission

November 7, 2018

Loudoun County Government Center

1 Harrison Street S.E., Leesburg

RE: Loudoun 2040 comprehensive plan update

Good evening Mr. Chairman and members of the Loudoun County Planning Commission. My name is Tony Howard and I am the President of the Loudoun Chamber of Commerce.

It is my privilege to address you this evening on behalf of the more than 1,200 businesses and organizations that comprise the Loudoun Chamber's membership.

I thank you for this opportunity to share the Chamber's perspective on the draft Loudoun 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

I will preface my comments by stating the Chamber's position on this Plan represents the collective input offered by hundreds of our members, many of whom were active throughout the Envision Loudoun process.

This includes several who served on the Stakeholders committee, those who attended community input meetings and the many more who offered their comments throughout the process.

In fact, there were so many comments from Loudoun Chamber members that it commanded an entire section within the Stakeholders Advisory committee's final report.

Though these Loudoun residents, business owners and community leaders come from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, all felt passionately that our shared vision for Loudoun's future must focus on sustaining our economy and the quality of life for all residents, employees and visitors.

Based on our members' collective perspective, the Chamber's Board of directors has adopted a policy statement that focuses on four main chapters of the draft Plan.

Economic Development

The first is economic development. Loudoun is a world class place in which to live, work and raise a family 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 all citizens.

That is why the Loudoun 2040 plan must continue and strengthen the County's customer-focused approach that views businesses as partners in Loudoun's success.

Loudoun's economy is strong because of our skilled workforce. Envision Loudoun must prioritize workforce development, by addressing the infrastructure challenges that make workforce attraction and retention difficult.

These include the lack of available workforce housing, an improving yet still challenging transportation network and land use policies that need to become more responsive to changing market conditions, while still preserving the natural heritage that Loudouners cherish.

Housing

The policies addressing the cost, diversity and availability of housing options for Loudoun's workforce will have the greatest impact on the success of the Loudoun 2040 plan.

Loudoun is unquestionably suffering from a housing affordability crisis that is hurting the youngest, the oldest and the lowest income members of our workforce.

Too many Loudouners are paying too much of their monthly income on housing. Limited housing supply is making this situation worse by driving up costs.

The County's own expert analysis shows that by the year 2040, Loudoun's current plans would leave us 19,000 housing units short of meeting our workforce's needs.

Sadly, a lack diverse and affordable housing choices is impacting our newest and future workforce the most.

After investing billions of taxpayers' dollars into public education, Loudoun needs a housing strategy that will allow our students and our investment in their education to remain here in Loudoun.

Transportation

On the subject of transportation, there is good news; Loudoun is attracting new jobs, residents and investment because this is a world class community in which to live and do business.

To keep our positive momentum, Loudoun needs a transportation network that will support economic growth, create vibrant, safe communities and protect our natural resources.

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

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

Land Use

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 locate.

Urban Policy Areas: Specifically, the Chamber is strongly supportive of the proposed Urban Policy Areas that target denser transit-oriented, mixed-use developments around Metrorail stations and other transportation assets.

Compact urban style development at future Metrorail stations and at other transit-accessible locations support our economic development goals, particularly if they provide diverse housing choices for workers and residents at different income levels.

When done correctly, urban-style activity centers can provide the type of entertainment, dining and interactive experiences our residents have told us they want.

Transition Policy Area: The limited amount of developable space in the urban and suburban areas demands new and more thoughtful approaches in the Transition Policy Areas.

With the right strategies and safeguards, Loudoun is quite capable of adding a reasonable and limited amount of desperately needed housing units in the transition area, while protecting our rural policy area from the impacts of suburban development.

That is why the Chamber supports the proposed strategy to target specific areas of the TPA for higher density residential and mixed-use development that create affordable and diverse housing options in compact communities.

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.