



Vol. 42 No. 1

www.citizensforfauquier.org

Summer 2009

Will Fauquier's Economic Development Support Our Open Space Businesses?

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Responding to a request from the Fauquier County Board of Supervisors, Citizens for Fauquier County (CFFC) prepared an analysis of the employment levels and real estate tax rates among Fauquier and counties to our East and South, and characteristics of salary differences across these counties, as well as the characteristics and availability of Fauquier's work force.

Based on this analysis, CFFC presented a series of recommendations addressing support of the County's Economic Development efforts for Agriculture, Equine, and Forestry businesses—which are today's most prevalent industries in Fauquier—along with Commercial, Industrial and Retail categories addressed by the County Department of Economic Development.

This analysis showed that counties within our region which have more commercial and industrial businesses and higher employment levels also had higher real estate tax rates. The Figure 1 shows a summary table of total employment per county, based on Virginia

| | Fauquier | Stafford | Prince Wm | Loudoun | Fairfax |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Total Employees | 21,336 | 35,484 | 103,726 | 133,920 | 587,954 |
| 2009 Real Estate Tax Rate per \$100 Value | \$ 0.7650 | \$ 0.8400 | \$ 1.0322 | \$ 1.2450 | \$ 0.9200 |

Sources: Virginia Employment Commission; Tax Rates from County Web sites

Figure 1. Employees per County Compared to County Real Estate Tax Rates in Selected Nearby Counties

Comparison of Knowledge-Worker Salaries by Industry in Selected Counties

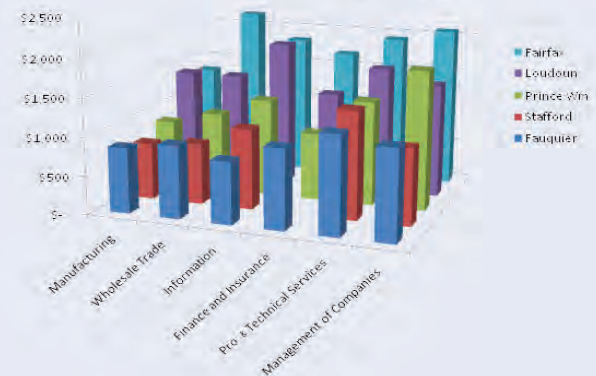


Figure 2. Comparison of Knowledge-Worker Salaries by Industry in Selected Counties

Counties within our region which have more commercial and industrial businesses and higher employment levels also have higher real estate tax rates.

Employment Commission data and individual County real estate tax rates.

The salary difference by industry, particularly in knowledge-worker industries, was also addressed. This salary disparity between Fauquier and counties closer to Washington DC, shown in Figure 2, is the primary reason approximately 75% of Fauquier's employed residents commute to counties to our east.

Additionally, the analysis addressed the fact that current accounting methods and reporting formats do not provide for identifying County tax revenue from Agriculture, Equine and Forestry businesses in a manner similar to the way Commercial and Industrial tax revenue is discretely identified. The accounting and financial practices used totally discount the value of the

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The Bealeton That Bealeton Said It Didn't Want

Residents and business owners of Lee District updated the County Comprehensive Plan to manage their Service District's future growth responsibly. Then came Mintbrook.

If some of us thought that the bursting of the real estate bubble would provide a break from the recent pace and scale of development, the Mintbrook application put that notion to rest.

Located in the northwest quadrant of the Bealeton Service District, the Mintbrook application seeks to amend the Bealeton Comprehensive Plan to allow a mixed-use community with nearly 1,000 new residential units. In September of last year, the principles of Bealeton Gateway, LLC, submitted a plan that envisions a neo-traditional community with a town center, parks, community amenities such as a YMCA, and a redesign of Route 17 that would create the Main Street that residents of Bealeton have long dreamed about.

This request for a Comprehensive Plan amendment has much to recommend it. The Lee District residents who worked on the existing Bealeton Comprehensive Plan for two years wrote:

The community...aspires that future growth should generate a more traditional atmosphere as Bealeton reaches its ultimate size of some 3,300 dwellings and 9,000 people. The community anticipates the need for additional public facilities and services to improve its quality of life and meet this emerging resident and business population, such as:

- Regional and town parks, jogging, and bicycle trails;
- Additional church, volunteer and fraternal organization sites; and a
- Prosperous town center with a mix of commercial, office and employment uses.

The Mintbrook proposal's emphasis on creating a walkable core of shops, offices, schools, churches and other institutions might be what transforms Bealeton from its current mass

of highway strip development into the quality of town that Fauquier County residents should demand.

So, is there a problem?

There are several.

The Bealeton Comprehensive Plan established a boundary to create a "hard edge" between the density of the town and its rural surroundings.

dwellings would nearly double the Bealeton population and create a densely developed neighborhood that is not in keeping with the scale of the surrounding area. The County staff report notes the 208 acres within the service district are zoned for 486 residential units and the Freedom Place plan had only 358 units. The Mintbrook plan

habitat and damage to, even elimination of, the upstream and downstream plants and the aquatic life that require free movement along the stream.

For these reasons, the Planning Commission voted to recommend denial of the Mintbrook proposal at their March meeting.

The Board of Supervisors considered the application at their May 14, 2009 meeting, with results not known when this issue of the *Monitor* went to press. For the latest news, and CFFC's response to it, visit the Web site, www.citizensforfauquier.org.



The plan for Mintbrook as it stood during the open house held by the developers on March 17.

The Mintbrook application asks to move the northern boundary of the Bealeton Service District to include an additional 125 acres. While the developers argue that this additional acreage is required to make the project profitable, Centex's Freedom Place plan, which received County approval for the same site, did not expand the Service District. In the five public hearings held before the Planning Commission, community residents were unanimous that the Service District boundary be respected.

The proposed 1,000 new

far exceeds the number of new dwellings that area residents planned for, expect, and desire.

It is also not a secret that the area surrounding Route 17—Marsh Road—is a marsh. This property is completely bisected by floodplain. 65 acres, 19% of the proposed site, are floodplain.

Development of the property will have considerable impacts on wetlands. The County engineering office raised numerous concerns about the current proposal for stormwater management. Among the list of potential consequences: the destruction of upstream wetlands and stream

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businesses that maintain our open space, and are the foundation of Fauquier County's unique character.

While emphasis has been placed in some quarters on the fact that Fauquier's Commercial and Industrial real estate, property, machinery, and license tax revenue is less than 14% of County tax revenue, the fact that properties classified as Agricultural contribute a nearly equal amount in real estate taxes is frequently discounted.

CFFC's submission to the Supervisors included a series of alternative policies for consideration. They address a broad range of economic development in Fauquier County, including small business support, regional tourism coordination, improved planning for retail development, and promotion of agriculture, equine and forestry business growth.

A full copy of the CFFC letter submitted to the Board of Supervisors on this issue is available on the "Our Community" page at the CFFC Web site: www.citizensforfauquier.org.

Auburn Battlefields Clear First Hurdle



Map from the PIF showing Auburn II. The outlined area incorporates the previous day's fighting, known as Auburn I.

In the summer of 2007, ICFFC received a grant from the American Battlefield Protection Program to help fund an in-depth study of the Auburn Battlefields for eventual consideration for nomination to the State and National Registers of Historic Places.



These funds, as well as monies raised from residents who live within the battlefields area, resulted in the hiring of a historic researcher and an archaeologist who have produced stunning documentation on the events that took place at Auburn on October 13 and 14 in 1863, during the Civil War.

For over a year, work has been under way to produce a historical and archaeological

analysis about these battles and the area in general.

The 27-page Preliminary Information Form (PIF), an overview of the event, was recently reviewed by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources' (VDHR) Evaluation Team.

According to Joanie Evans of the VDHR's Valley Regional Office, the PIF "passed with flying colors." Evans said she is going to recommend that the State Review Board determine at the June meeting that the Auburn Battlefields are eligible for listing on the State Register of Historic Places. The Review Board will then study the complete nomination documentation, which consists of over 240 pages of details on the battle, the artifacts found in the core

area, the overall history of the area and a natural and cultural analysis.

Listing on the State Register will be determined at the September meeting of the State Review Board in Richmond. Once the state lists a site, it is then sent to the National Park Service for consideration for the National Register of Historic Places.

Is Fauquier County the Birthplace of Modern Agriculture?

The Auburn site offers much more of historical significance than the important Civil War battles fought there. Among these is the home of Stephen McCormick: plantation owner, miller, industrialist—and possibly the father of modern American agriculture!

In June of 1826 and December of 1837, McCormick received two patents for the design and construction of a cast-iron moldboard plow with detachable and replaceable components. This plow was first produced on his Auburn estate, and had revolutionary implications for the trajectory of agriculture across North America.



Historic map showing general placement of features attributed to the McCormick complex. Map was seriously in error with respect to terrain and topographic features.

The site occupies terrain that has been dramatically landscaped and terraced into the lower slopes of a weathered south trending upland ridge at the point where they intersect a narrow bench or bottomlands north of Cedar Run. Historically, this ridge has been identified as Coffee Hill. The hill face was deliberately terraced, with each terrace serving as a place for the foundation of the main house and/or some other associated structure or activity area. The farm/industrial complex, at the time of Stephen McCormick, would have looked very impressive sitting on the hill facing the crossroads of the Rogues (Route 602), Dumfries (Route 667), and Double Poplar (Route 670) roads in front of Cedar Run and Neavil's Mill.



Was the Battle of Coffee Hill also the birthplace of modern American agriculture? The study promoted by CFFC adds strength to the cause for preservation.

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President's Message

I am pleased once again to add my thoughts to this edition of the *Monitor*, the publication of your conservation society.

The articles in these pages address some timeless Fauquier subjects: agriculture, economics and battles fought for control of the precious soil which defines this unique place.

The ability of farms and farmers to sustain themselves hereabouts is central to holding on to the green vistas and open spaces we love. Healthy farm operations are also essential to stable county economics. But County government has not yet put in place a methodology for measuring, let alone assessing, this vital segment.

Happily, we are entering a new period of broader awareness of these necessities.

The Board of Supervisors recently launched a campaign for increased economic development with a retreat at which it was clear they comprehend the vital economic position occupied by both agriculture and the abundant natural assets of the county. These are precisely the conservation objectives that Citizens for Fauquier County has championed for over 40 years.

For the retreat, we prepared an analytical report for the Supervisors (discussed in this edition). It was well-received and we will be playing a continuing and important role in this campaign.

Economic growth which balances our genuine community needs, taps our obvious strengths and preserves our

essence would be a benefit for Fauquier County. Alternative models have undermined counties to our east, with developments of the sort now suddenly being proposed for Warrenton's eastern gateway.

At the retreat, the Supervisors struggled for a mission statement for the new campaign. Thinking of beautiful Fauquier, and why we live here, I suggested to them that they consider simply: "securing commerce of which we will be proud."

We will keep you posted.

Yakir Lubowsky
President

OUR MISSION

To preserve
the natural, historic
and agricultural
resources of
Fauquier County
and to protect the
County's unique
quality of life
through education
and leadership.