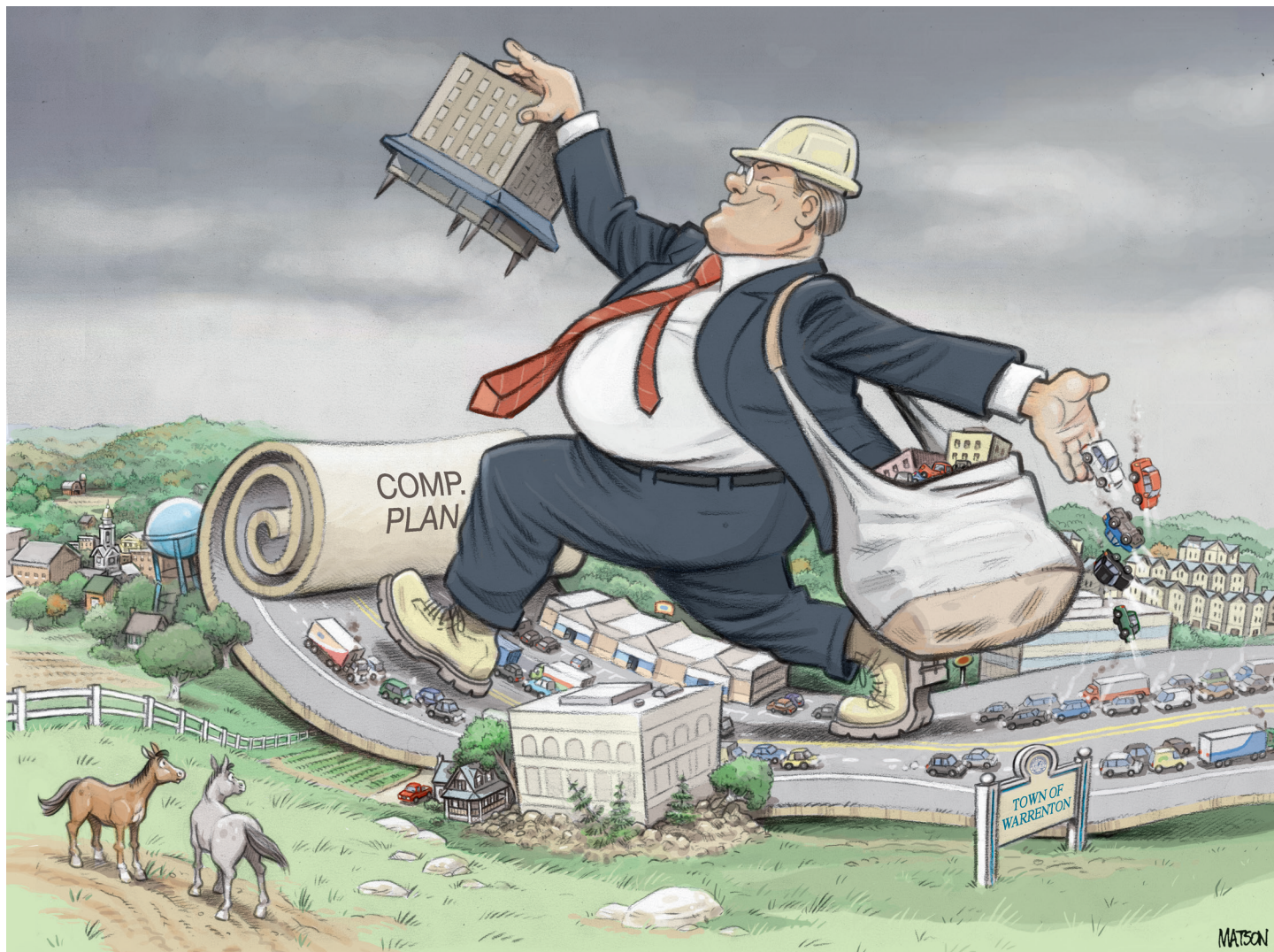


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Warrenton Council Confronts Flawed Comprehensive Plan

By Christopher Bonner

The wildly unpopular Warrenton Comprehensive Plan will change Warrenton, and that change will be forever. Population will increase by 50 percent within 20 years. Traffic will explode. Quiet neighborhoods will become through streets. Taxes will increase.

Historic, charming Warrenton will become the faceless, congested Northern Virginia suburbs many of us fled.

If Warrenton Town Council approves the comp plan, the big winner will be developers, could lucrative residential complexes up to six

stories of any design without citizen review. Retailers, who want more foot traffic, will also be winners.

The comp plan was quietly on its way to being approved first by the planning commission and then by the town council. The skids were greased, but then Covid 19 happened. Residents with time on their hands began wading through hundreds of pages of suggestions, directives and mandates to discover that something was lost in translation. And that something was Warrenton's small-town feel and character.

After receiving blistering comments from 56 of the 62 citizens who participated in the first public hearing, the Planning Commission was tasked with redrafting and streamlining the comp plan.

A revised plan, to be released any day, is not expected to be materially different from the original plan. Unless residents of Warrenton and Fauquier County voice their concerns directly to Town Council, nothing will change.

In their rush to get the comp plan adopted by council, supporters gave away the store.

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Christopher Bonner
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Covid 19 Changes Conservation Landscape

By **Les Cheek**
CFFC President

CFFC's responses to the coronavirus pandemic have mirrored the emerging scientific consensus that COVID-19 is a long-term menace to life as we have known it, not a short-term inconvenience.

Like those of other established institutions, CFFC's priorities have moved away from steps to alleviate immediate individual hardships toward substantive reactions to major shifts in societal patterns.

In the earliest days of Virginia's statewide lockdown of most business enterprises and large social gatherings, CFFC contributed \$20,000 to a charitable initiative aimed at enabling local farmers suddenly deprived of their commercial and institutional customers to sell their products to an experienced food aggregator (Vint Hill's 4P Foods) for distribution to food banks and needy individuals. CFFC's lead gift spurred a huge response from other non-profit organizations.

As spring turned to summer, it became clear that enforced work-from-home rules were stimulating a wholesale shift in housing preferences among those whose jobs enabled them to telecommute. Exurban and rural residential real estate sales skyrocketed as home-bound urban and suburban office workers realized they could have more space for less money without long commutes.

Unsurprisingly, the surge in exurban and rural residential sales has thus far involved high-end properties, prompting CFFC to ponder the necessity of assuring that there is an analogous market for those needed to service incoming telecommuters — teachers, first responders and skilled workers.

To this end, CFFC has forcefully endorsed a recent proposal by experienced developers to convert the brick barracks at Vint Hill into 200 market-rate one- and two-bedroom apartments while preserving the historical character of the solidly-constructed buildings.

More generally, CFFC believes that Fauquier's current zoning ordinance, with its well-tested limitations on subdivision development, is an adequate defense against any foreseeable explosion in housing demand.

As always, CFFC relies on you, our members, to alert us to unmet community needs and to provide the financial resources essential to appropriate CFFC responses to these needs. Thank you for your continuing support. Please stay safe. 🇺🇸



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For example, the plan:

- Tosses the keys to Warrenton's future to builders who will have a free hand in designing and constructing almost anything they want — up to six stories — without citizen review.
- Bets the future on residential growth by turning one of the town's few remaining industrial plots over to homebuilders, forgoing high-paying jobs brought by industry. Without revenue from business and industry, higher taxes will make up the difference. And that's just for starters.

The comp plan, as proposed, will be a costly enterprise for Warrenton and Fauquier taxpayers:

- Warrenton taxpayers will foot the bill for costly water projects, and even the drought reserve may be threatened because there isn't enough water to support a housing boom.
- Residents will also pay for the controversial Timber Fence Parkway, knifing through two neighborhoods and skirting Rady Park, and the unneeded Southern Parkway. Quiet neighborhoods will become through streets choked with cars, eroding our quality of life.
- Fauquier County taxpayers will be squeezed to provide new schools, public safety and other services required by a town experiencing tremendous growth.

Please write or call your town council member today and say that Warrenton deserves a comp plan that works for all of us, not just developers. A council vote on the plan could be next month. Please visit citizensforfaquier.org for the latest information. 🇺🇸

A Framework for Preserving Fauquier County's Open Space

By Kevin Ramundo

Conservation-minded folks often engage to oppose specific projects that threaten our countryside. That's great, and Citizens for Fauquier County (CFFC) is often out front on these efforts.

What does a comprehensive framework for protecting open space look like? To help answer this question, I spoke with conservation leaders with local government experience and those in non-profit organizations including CFFC, Goose Creek Association, Land Trust of Virginia, Piedmont Environmental Council, and Virginia Piedmont Heritage Area Association.

These and other non-profits do a great job of protecting our rural lands. But it's a daunting task. Hardly a week goes by when there isn't a new winery, brewery or event center that hopes to exploit our rural heritage, or a new housing subdivision which will consume open space and irreplaceable, prime agricultural land.

To be clear, all development is not bad and most, if not all, conservation advocates would agree. But we know that developers can skirt or ignore the policies in comprehensive plans or zoning regulations to pursue their own interests.

The development community is very effective. They are highly influential in state and local government; they band together in associations to press their agenda; they give generously to political candidates who favor development; and, they are incredibly knowledgeable and well-resourced when it comes to land use issues.

Given the challenges, what must the preservation/conservation community do to win?

Elect pro-conservation state and local officials.

We need county supervisors, town council members, mayors and state officials who consistently support conservation through laws,

comprehensive plans, zoning and programs. We need to encourage our elected leaders to adopt long-term conservation measures. Fortunately, Fauquier County has a Board of Supervisors that places a high priority on protecting open space, and is responsive to our citizens.

Educate the broader population about the benefits of conservation and preservation.

We must constantly reach out and look for opportunities to "broaden our base." Traditional communications help, but actual experiences are more compelling. Two great examples are the Land Trust of Virginia's bike tour showcasing the beautiful countryside, and Piedmont Environmental Council's Piedmont Memorial Overlook adjacent to Sky Meadow State Park, with its amazing views. We must constantly emphasize that open space enhances the quality of

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Comprehensive Plan Threatens Warrenton's Water Resources

By Sally Semple

The proposed Warrenton Comprehensive Plan threatens the town's reliable daily water supply with an aggressive 50 percent population growth strategy. Warrenton's reservoirs, wells, and treatment plant are not unlimited resources. Their capacity has been challenged in the past at significantly lower population levels.

Some may recall the 2007 drought, when the Town invoked "voluntary" water restrictions. By September 2007, the water level at the Warrenton Reservoir had dropped by half, the Airlee reservoir was down four feet and was dropping 1.5 inches a day, and Warrenton was only days away from mandatory water restrictions. Fortunately, it rained.

Back in 2007, Warrenton had a 32 percent cushion between its daily water supply capacity ("safe yield") and average daily demand. Plan Warrenton 2040 would shrink that cushion to just 9%, even with the reactivation of two dormant wells.

Consecutive days of higher than average water usage can strain systems that don't adequately plan for water storage, breakages/downtime, and drought. Some towns, even in water-rich states, must endure routine restrictions on water use, simply because town planners did not pace development with water resources. Is this Warrenton's fate?

Warrenton uses at least 50 percent more water on peak water demand days than on the "average day." The growth called for in Plan Warrenton 2040 would force Warrenton to run at a deficit of over 875,000 gallons of water on a peak day at plan build-out. The town has never experienced daily deficits of that magnitude. The peak day demand gap in 2007 was only 154,000 gallons.

How will Warrenton fare in future droughts with fewer reserves? Might water restrictions be imposed just to meet normal demand in the hotter months? Is the town depending on adding water storage or expanding the

reservoir? Why is this not discussed in the proposed Comprehensive Plan? How much additional storage do we need and at what cost?

The current Comprehensive Plan states, "The size of the reservoir ... could be expanded ... but only at considerable public expense to raise the dam." Why do planners now believe it is to our benefit to grow the town beyond our current water resources?

Worse, Warrenton Plan 2040 may have underestimated future water needs. Questions remain unanswered about the omission of water demand for the new Walker Drive development, and other projects with site plans approved since 2015. Further, Warrenton Plan 2040 water supply projections assume "There will be no substantial or major operational problems and mechanical failures in the current water and wastewater system..." This unrealistic assumption is in direct conflict with basic system reliability safeguards for determination of safe water yield.

In 2018, the Virginia Code was amended to protect citizens from such shortsightedness. The law now requires that sustainability of the water supply be specifically addressed in Comprehensive Plans. Warrenton's proposed Comprehensive Plan should be no exception.

The town should institute system reliability standards for safe yield from wells, complete an inventory to identify any sites omitted from the water demand projections, identify the amount of water storage needed to meet repeated days of peak water use in summer, clearly state if existing water supplies are sufficient for the targeted growth, increased water demand will trigger environmental requirements to plan for a water plant expansion, and adjust population targets and aggressive building policies to ensure that demand does not outpace current water supply resources. 🏡

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life for everyone by providing recreational opportunities, a stronger agricultural economy and lower local taxes.


Support stricter zoning ordinances, state laws and policies that favor conservation and preservation.

Zoning ordinances ultimately determine what developers can and cannot do. Comprehensive plans matter, but it's even more important to get the zoning right.

Consider "agritourism." It deserves public support, but look at what actually happens. We have "farm wineries" serving 1,500 customers on a week-end, and "farm breweries" that aren't really farms. Agritourism rules, zoning and enforcement at the state and local level must be tightened up so we don't jeopardize the countryside that residents value and that attract these venues in the first place.

We must also have well-funded policies to promote conservation easements, and purchase/transfer of development rights programs that provide landowners with financially attractive alternatives to simply selling their land for development.

Get personally involved to oppose undesirable projects.

The public has a powerful voice as we recently saw when a proposed restaurant, hotel and event center outside of Marshall was withdrawn. Another example was the public's opposition to a dramatic expansion of a country restaurant, event center and overnight accommodations just west of Upperville in an area zoned rural/agricultural. I would encourage everyone to become involved in conservation matters beyond your immediate location. The more involvement, the stronger our voice. 



PLEASE JOIN US.

Be a part of the only organization dedicated to preserving the rural, agricultural character of Fauquier County. CFFC tracks every land use rezoning or special exception proposal before the Planning Commission with our exclusive, monthly Land Use Report. CFFC also covers historical preservation, transportation and the environment. Please visit citizensforfauquier.org for a better understanding of how you may become involved.

Citizens for Fauquier County, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, needs your support to assure that future development is consistent with Fauquier's rural agricultural tradition. Please visit citizensforfauquier.org and join today.