

MIXED USE DISTRICTS

Background

Plan Warrenton 2040 transforms nearly 40% of the Town's acreage to dense mixed use with the creation of four "Character Districts" and the Broadview Avenue overlay district. The mixed use development would blend residential with commercial or industrial uses in a single building or across a designated parcel of land. Illustrations in the Plan show a preponderance of dense residential use in these districts on land that is currently zoned for commercial, light industrial and office use. The Plan allows building heights equivalent to 5 to 7 story buildings across large portions of the mixed use districts.

WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS ABOUT THE MIXED USE DISTRICTS?

The Plan provides so much flexibility in the mixed use districts that the possible growth and impact levels are unknown, and too many major planning decisions are unaddressed.

The Plan allows too much residential growth in the mixed use districts, risking the town's economic sustainability, and too much density and growth in these districts overall, jeopardizing Warrenton's character, and quality of life.

Concerns center on what, when, how much, and where the Town wants to grow within these districts:

- WHAT is the ultimate desired mix of uses? The Plan focuses on a broad range of housing types with very little attention paid to creating a sustainable balance of housing with commercial and industrial/office uses. The Plan's generous allowances for residential growth will ensure that Warrenton's large undeveloped industrial lots will convert to mainly residential use. This in turn will necessitate property tax increases to sustain a town overly burdened by residential growth.

Office development is only an optional use of an unspecified portion of one district. The plan shrinks the town's inventory of undeveloped land dedicated to industrial/office use from over 90 acres to zero. Only a small portion of one district is dedicated to industrial use (the Makers Overlay District), but that overlay is on land which is already largely developed. The Town cannot create a successful makers job district with so little accessible land. Warrenton will regret the loss of industrial land when markets turn and the need for large flexible industrial or office space, separated from a residential complex, arises.

- WHEN and in what order should build-out occur? Allowing so much residential use in the large undeveloped (greenfield) parcels will make those parcels the first to develop. These developments will have a large, immediate impact.

Allowing these districts to develop by-right and not through a rezoning process removes the town's ability to align the rate of growth with the availability of resources (water, sewer, road expansion), and removes proffers as a means to mitigate and pay for off-site impacts.

- **HOW MUCH?** The districts contain no maximum density per acre guidelines, nor guardrails on minimum and maximum percentages of commercial, residential, industrial/office use.

Without any density or use guidelines:

- it is hard to tell what these districts will look like
 - it is impossible to understand traffic impacts, plan for water and sewer resources, or evaluate the cost of the growth
 - the Plan will result in dense projects similar to rezonings rejected in the past because of their traffic impacts and imbalance with community needs
 - a better work/live community balance cannot be achieved if the town decreases land available for higher paying jobs and entrepreneurs
- **WHERE** will development occur? Growth will be focused on the greenfield parcels -- it is the path of least resistance and the most profitable. This growth could saturate the residential market, further reducing the incentive for infill and redevelopment of failing areas where residents most desire that transformation.

WE RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING FOR THE MIXED USE DISTRICTS:

1. More planning for the mixed use districts is needed:
 - Minimum and maximum percentages of commercial, residential, office, and/or industrial should be identified for each district.
 - Maximum density allowances should be identified for each district.
2. The town is giving away far too much industrial land. Sound planning means holding on to resources that the Town may need in the future, even if they are not going to be developed in the short term.
3. Implement the mixed use districts through rezoning applications, not by-right, and only through special use permits in discrete areas where there is a pressing need for redevelopment.
4. Reduce bonus density incentives for the residential market, except for affordable housing. The industrial and office market is the sector most in need of economic incentives.
5. Reduce the density of these districts in general. There is no need for 4 to 7 story buildings in Warrenton. It won't take many of these to compromise Warrenton's small town character.