

Fauquier Countryside is Facing a Perfect Storm of Development Threats

By Kevin Ramundo
CFFC President

I believe that Fauquier's long and successful tradition of open space and preservation is at risk in ways not seen since CFFC got its start in the mid 1980's when a proposed 3,200 home development in North Wales was successfully opposed. Yes, there have been restaurants and resorts proposed for rural areas, a few, mostly minor subdivisions, and farm wineries and breweries, but what we're seeing now is unprecedented in terms of magnitude and possible impact.

It's a perfect storm of development pressure from all around and from within Fauquier:

- Prince William County immediately to our east is contemplating major changes to its Comprehensive Plan to allow significant development in an area known as the Rural Crescent which was established in 1998 as a large rural area to protect against development in the rest of Prince William. See the article on page 2.

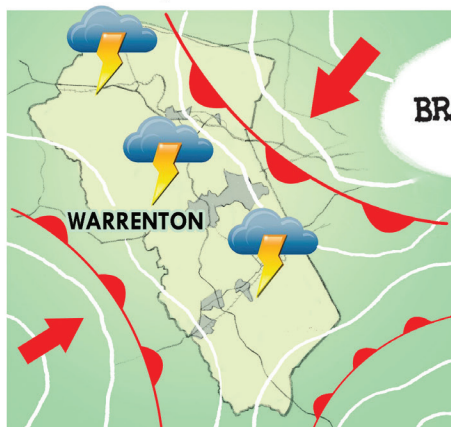
- Culpeper County approved the Clevengers Village development immediately adjacent to Fauquier at the intersection of Rixeyville Road and Lee Highway. Consisting of 1,700 acres, almost 800 homes and 400,000 square feet of commercial space, this approved development will increase congestion on existing roads and calls for new ones.
- And to our north in Loudoun County, applications for housing and data centers in the undeveloped areas in the east and central areas of the county are increasing competition for land and could add development pressure in the rural western part of the county which shares a lengthy border with Fauquier.
- The development threat is not just on the county's borders. The town of Warrenton adopted a fast-growth comprehensive plan in Spring of 2021 and more recently, has proposed adding 1,100 acres of county land, much of it rural, to the town.

These threats are being driven by powerful socio-economic forces. The ever-growing internet economy will continue to increase demand for huge data centers that house the servers and networking equipment. These facilities are so large that they make big-box stores look like 7-11s. There are 140 data centers in Loudoun and a new area of Prince William's Rural Crescent may be rezoned to allow them. And there are plans to build an Amazon data center in Warrenton, and Dominion Power is planning to extend a high-voltage power line across eastern Fauquier to provide electricity to it.

And there is also the prospect of losing valuable farmland and forests to so-called solar "farms" being proposed for the southern part of the county. These facilities can consume hundreds, if not thousands, of acres, and adversely impact agriculture which is the largest single sector of Fauquier's economy, and which

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FAUQUIER STORM ALERT



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Proposed Changes in Prince William Would Affect Fauquier

By Julie Bolthouse

Piedmont Environmental Council

Director of Land Use, and CFFC Land Use Advisor

Prince William County which shares a border with eastern Fauquier County is currently updating its Comprehensive Plan. As currently proposed, the plan includes big changes for an area known as the Rural Crescent which runs along the 30-mile border the two counties share.

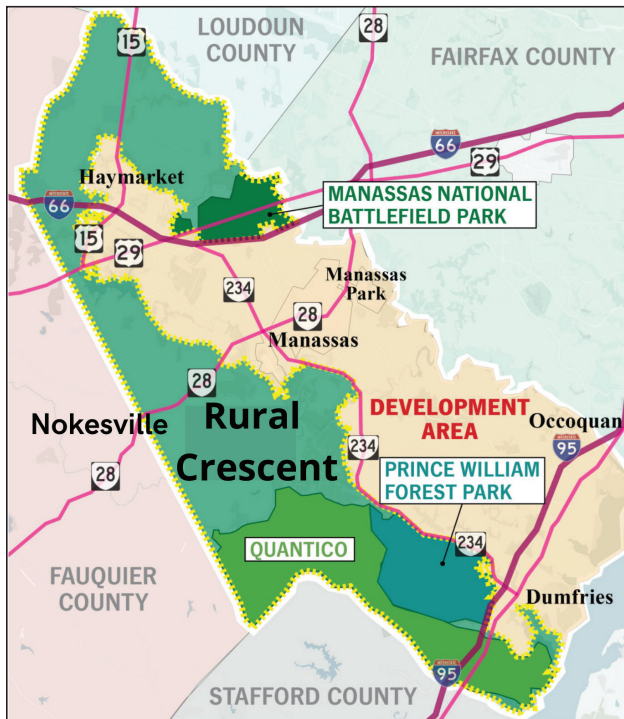
The Rural Crescent was created in 1998 to help control urban sprawl by defining a protected rural area. Consisting of 80,000 acres or approximately 35% of the county, this rural land has helped protect the Occoquan Reservoir watershed and various public parks, including the Manassas

Crescent along Rt. 28 in Nokesville would be converted to industrial use. This is a radical shift from the current plan with little explanation from Prince William officials regarding the reasons behind the changes. The Nokesville area in both counties is rural and Rt. 28 is currently only two lanes.

These land use changes, which do not appear to be based on need, data or community input, would encroach into rural areas and significantly increase traffic, particularly the number of trucks on Rt. 28 and surrounding country roads.

The traffic generated by the envisioned development would necessitate costly road widening and improvements in both Prince William and Fauquier. In addition, the increased industrial activity could affect nearby property owners who rely on wells, and those engaged in farming in and around Nokesville.

Prior to adopting such significant land use changes, Prince William County needs to study the traffic and other potential impacts to property owners in both Prince William and Fauquier; openly discuss these impacts with Fauquier officials; and, conduct outreach specifically to the Nokesville community. CFFC would encourage concerned citizens

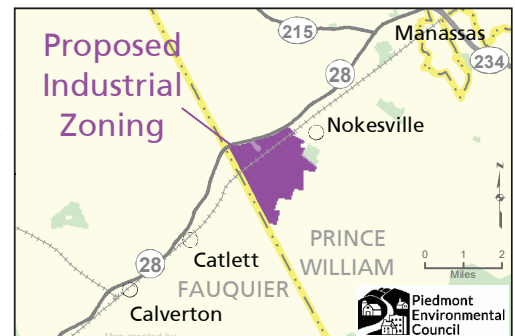


Map Credit: Prince William Times

National Battlefield. County residents also benefited by avoiding the costly extension of infrastructure to serve scattered development in the countryside. For Fauquier County, the Rural Crescent serves as a buffer for the mountainous and agricultural lands along the shared border.

The draft plan would eliminate the concept of the Rural Crescent and allow the extension of public water and sewer; double the allowable housing density in approximately 80% of the area; and, introduce even higher densities (up to 10 units per acre) on the remaining acreage. These changes could threaten the area's water quality, agricultural and forested lands, and parklands.

More specifically, and with the most direct impact on Fauquier, 1,800 acres of the Rural



in Prince William to express their views to their elected leaders, and folks in Fauquier to encourage their leaders to engage with their counterparts in Prince William to minimize the consequences of any changes on Fauquier.

Utility-Scale Solar – Concerns Abound

By David Gibson
CFFC Board Member

You may recall that the July 2021 issue of *The Monitor* had an article about utility-scale solar (USS) and concerns CFFC had about how these extensive facilities could result in the loss of significant tracts of farmland and forests. The article concluded with the observation that open-space conservation, the agricultural economy and solar energy facilities could co-exist with careful policies and safeguards.

Since that time, the need for thoughtful policies has become even more apparent. CFFC established a task force last year to study the many issues associated with siting, approving, and operating USS facilities. Our goal is to provide our best thinking to Fauquier County leaders on how to address the increasing demand for renewable energy while mitigating the risks and impacts these facilities undoubtedly can have. This last point is complicated because of limited experience in Virginia with the state's oldest facility, Remington Solar, having only been commissioned in 2017.

Our work has included conversations and meetings with other jurisdictions and organizations grappling with USS issues, including Fauquier County Farm Bureau and the American Farmland Trust. We consulted with USS developers and engineering companies and reviewed available documentation to understand their experience better. We are in the process of preparing our recommendations for the county.

What has become very clear to us is that the enthusiasm for solar power must be tempered with the fact that so-called solar farms are not farms at all but industrial facilities that need

to be very carefully sited, designed, built, and operated over a 30-to-40-year life span and then successfully decommissioned so the local jurisdiction isn't left with problems. Beyond the farm, forest, and habitat loss, the collective experience from other counties has identified significant operational risks from stormwater runoff, flooding and erosion. There are also risks from groundwater pollution from the chemicals in the panels and herbicides used to maintain the facilities.

Outside of operations, numerous jurisdictions have experienced financial and bonding problems, which can jeopardize the successful decommissioning of facilities. Developers of solar facilities are often focused on quick permitting to realize tax incentives and then flipping the operation over to another company. It is not unusual for power generation facilities to have multiple owners and operators over their lifespan. Avoiding these actual or perceived risks has caused regulators to wisely enact more stringent requirements.

Virginia, which strongly encouraged these facilities under the Virginia Clean Economy Act (VCEA) passed in early 2020, is now revisiting the topic. House Bill 206 enacted during the past year requires an "analysis" of small energy projects that disturb more than 10 acres of prime agricultural soils, more than 50 acres of contiguous forest lands or any forest lands enrolled in a forest conservation program. The bill also requires the developer to disclose the project and hold a hearing. These are steps in the right direction, but there are currently no outright prohibitions in the bill, which charges the Department of Environmental Quality with convening an advisory panel to devise implementing regulations. Ultimately, it will remain up to the counties to develop ordinances for reviewing these projects.

CFFC's utility-scale solar study and specific recommendations will be completed in the next several months. While we agree that solar power is desirable, much care must be exercised in approving these facilities because the risks could easily outweigh the benefits. 🏡



Solar facility under construction in Spotsylvania County.
Photo Credit: Hugh Kenney, Piedmont Environmental Council

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contributes to our rural landscapes and tourism. Yes, we all want more green energy as climate change concerns increase, but not at the cost of our farms and forests. See article above.

What is occurring in Fauquier County is fundamentally different than before. In the past, our growth was driven by the influx of new residents seeking lower cost housing, less congestion, and more open space than what they could find in neighboring counties. Now it is being driven by societal demands that lead to

big data centers, distribution centers to facilitate on-line purchasing, and green energy generation, along with the increasingly tight housing markets throughout Northern Virginia.

CFFC is and will continue to understand these issues and recommend ways to balance growth and the county's rural heritage. But CFFC and others committed to keeping our county's open space, farms and historical treasures will need more support than ever from Fauquier's citizens. 🏡

Sam Mitchell Joins CFFC's Board




Sam Mitchell

CFFC is pleased to announce that Samuel Mitchell has joined its Board of Directors, effective June 1, 2022. Sam is a Fauquier native, a long-standing CFFC member and is dedicated to our mission of protecting open space, supporting agriculture and preserving historical resources. He lives in Springs Valley with his wife, Mary Ewing, and his responsibilities as a board member will include treasurer.

After earning a Bachelors and Masters in Business Administration degrees from Harvard, Sam pursued a career as an investment and financial adviser, and

has held very senior business executive roles including serving on numerous boards over the years. He is past president of the Fauquier Club and continues as a member. He joins three other recently elected new board members: Dave Gibson, Lori Keenan McGuinness and Ben Smith.

Sam's extensive business and financial experience will make CFFC's strong board even stronger and we look forward to his help in preserving Fauquier's future. 

PLEASE JOIN US

Please support Fauquier County's oldest conservation nonprofit dedicated to preserving the county's rural character. CFFC is a strong advocate for open space, historic preservation and a healthy agricultural economy. We track every land use rezoning or special exception before the Planning Commission and are quick to engage when inappropriate development threatens to bring Northern Virginia sprawl to Fauquier. Planning Commission developments are covered monthly in CFFC's exclusive Land Use Report.

Fauquier County is under tremendous pressure to grow as regional population soars and residents flee neighboring, built-out counties. Help protect Fauquier's future by joining CFFC, a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization. Visit citizensforfauquier.org and become involved.

