

Planning Commission – Environment Chapter Update

Background

Virginia is a Dillon rule state, where any power enjoyed by a locality must spring from an express grant by the legislature. Localities are required to adopt a Comprehensive Plan and a Subdivision Ordinance.

The Comprehensive Plan is a vision document. Rezoning and special use permit applications that do not match the vision, as detailed by the reasonable policies and action strategies in the Plan, can be denied. However, as a vision document, it is not designed to be an ordinance, and cannot be administered or enforced as an ordinance.

Although not specifically mandated, most localities also adopt a Zoning Ordinance, which implements the Comprehensive Plan and is legally enforceable.

The local Planning Commission is charged with reviewing the Comprehensive Plan at least once every five years and recommending changes to the Board. The Board can send any recommendation back to the Planning Commission with a list of issues they wish addressed.

Prince William County reviews the Comprehensive Plan on a rolling, chapter-by-chapter basis. The Board can initiate amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. Both the Board and Planning Commission can initiate amendments to the Zoning Ordinance.

The Comprehensive Plan is the foundation document of the land use process, which includes both legislative and ministerial (administrative) actions. Government staff is largely responsible for most ministerial decisions, which include site plans, site plan revisions and waivers to the County's minimum standards, as authorized in the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Ordinance and Design Constructions and Standards Manual.

Major revisions to an approved rezoning require a legislative action called a Proffer Amendment. These receive public hearings at the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors.