

FALLS CHURCH 2040

Introduction and Vision Chapter of the City's Comprehensive Plan

Adopted xxx, xx, xxxx

Falls Church Vision 2040



The Comprehensive Plan

A Comprehensive Plan is a policy mechanism that allows a community to guide growth and development in a coordinated manner that is consistent with the aspirations and visions of the community. The Plan aims to promote efficient growth and sustainable development. It is a long-range plan covering a period of 20 to 30 years; however, many of the strategies contained within this Plan may be targeted for implementation much sooner. In Falls Church, the Plan is also updated through the preparation of Small Area Plans.

A Comprehensive Plan considers a community's existing and future needs for dwellings, commerce, industry, public and semi-public facilities, environmental protection, energy efficiency, historic preservation, transportation, parks and recreation, and social and economic sustainability.

Legal Basis for Planning

Section 15.2-2223 of the Virginia Code requires all localities to prepare a Comprehensive Plan. As outlined in Section 15.2-2230 of Virginia Code and pursuant to the Falls Church Charter, Chapter 17 Planning, Zoning and Subdivision, the Planning Commission is responsible for preparing and recommending the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Legal Impacts of Plan

The Comprehensive Plan lays out a blueprint for future development and change. It informs land use, controls infrastructure, and guides public investment.

The Comprehensive Plan recommends future general land uses, assigning various uses (e.g., residential, commercial, mixed use) to particular areas of the City, which are reflected in a Future Land Use Map. The Zoning Ordinance codifies land development by placing requirements and constraints on different uses. The Zoning Ordinance should conform to the land use plan.

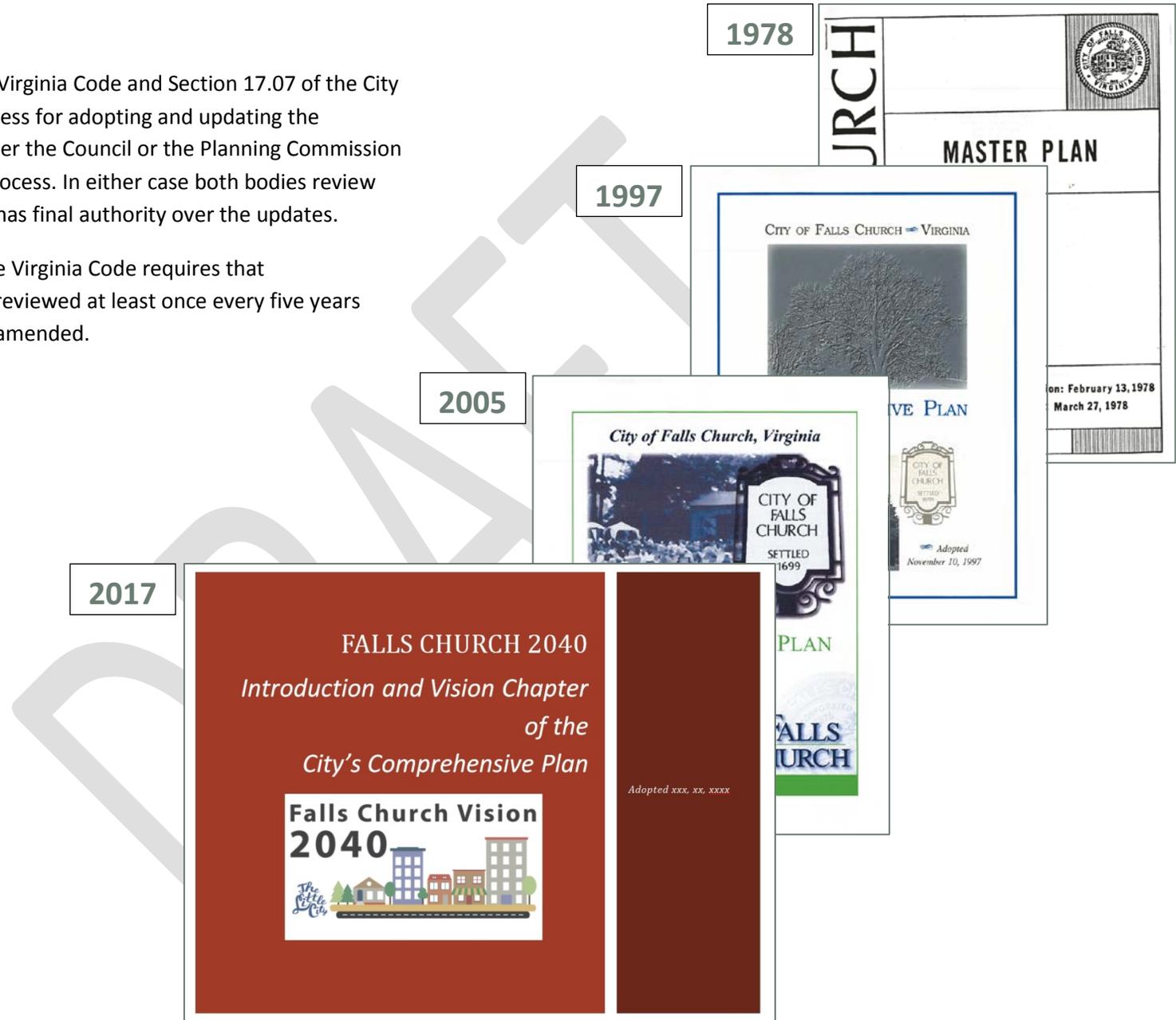
The Comprehensive Plan specifies and controls the general character, extent, and location of public infrastructure. Section 2232 of the Virginia Code and Section 17.07 of the City Charter requires that after adoption of the Plan, no street or street extension, square, park or other public way, ground, open space, school, public building or structure, or public utility facility (except railroad facility or underground natural gas or electric distribution facility) shall be constructed or authorized unless and until the general location, character and extent thereof has been approved by the Planning Commission, as being in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan.

Because of these restrictions on infrastructure location and character, the Comprehensive Plan provides a framework for the City's five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and, thus, public investment.

Updating the Plan

Section 15.2-2229 of the Virginia Code and Section 17.07 of the City Charter describe the process for adopting and updating the Comprehensive Plan. Either the Council or the Planning Commission can initiate the update process. In either case both bodies review the plan and the Council has final authority over the updates.

Section 15.2 – 2230 of the Virginia Code requires that comprehensive plans be reviewed at least once every five years and, where appropriate, amended.



Cultural History and Development

The City of Falls Church has multiple cultural influences and has gone through several distinct development eras. The sections below highlight the major influences and development trends.

1699 – European Settlement

The region was originally inhabited by Native peoples who lived along the major water courses, with trails and hunting grounds in the interior, but the City's development probably stems from its European colonial settlement ca. 1699. The center of the community and its namesake was The Falls Church (Episcopal), founded in 1733, with the present church dating to 1769. Both President George Washington and colonial statesman George Mason served on the parish vestry (governing board). The Church remains important in the City's landscape today.



Figure 1: An early photo of The Falls Church during the Civil War.

1800s – Population Growth

Growth in the township and the surrounding area occurred as the result of the community's strategic location just seven miles from the District of Columbia. The Leesburg Turnpike (today's Leesburg Pike/Route 7) was built to bring commerce from Leesburg to the port of Alexandria. In 1860 the Alexandria, Loudoun, and Hampshire (later the Washington and Old Dominion) Railroad brought rail service to Falls Church, connecting it to Alexandria and Leesburg. The village was held early in the Civil War by Confederate troops, but by fall 1861 it was occupied by Union forces through the end of the conflict in 1865. After the Civil War, a direct rail link to Washington, D.C., attracted numerous new residents who found the tranquil village a welcome relief from the bustle of the nation's capital. During Reconstruction, the City rebounded, and the town charter was issued in 1875. Trolley services came to the town in the early twentieth century.



Figure 2: The West Falls Church train station ca. 1900.

1880s-1920s - African American Settlement and the Struggle for Civil Rights

African Americans had lived in the Falls Church area since Colonial times, both enslaved and free, and by the end of the 19th century there was a thriving African American community in the City. In reaction to Jim Crow laws and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, in 1890 the City voted to cede one-third of its land, largely occupied by African Americans, to Fairfax County. The 1898 establishment of nearby U.S. Army Camp Alger for Spanish-American War training led to a significant if brief population increase (more than 30,000 men) that strained local transportation systems and other services.

In 1915 the City proposed an ordinance that required racial segregation. Dr. E.B. Henderson and Joseph Tinner fought the

ordinance by organizing the Colored Citizens' Protective League, which became the first rural branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The City became a focus of Civil Rights advocacy and activism over the next decades.

1950s-1990s - Post-WWII Suburban Development

During WW II the entire Capital Region grew in response to the war effort. Falls Church became a city in 1948. In the years following World War II, Falls Church's cohesiveness and character were increasingly impacted by the Northern Virginia building boom and the advent of automobile-related commercial development. During the 1950s Northern Virginia experienced a dramatic increase in suburban growth, both residential and commercial. Commercial development also began to take shape in the form of "strip commercial", or commercial development occurring in narrow bands along major roadways. Development in Falls Church followed these trends.

The area's highways were being constructed to provide convenient transportation within the region. The Capital Beltway opened in 1964, which spurred the development of Tysons Corner and associated development near the City. I-66 was completed inside the Beltway in 1982, providing another link between Falls Church and the District of Columbia. During the 1970s and 1980s the City of Falls Church continued to experience small amounts of residential and commercial growth, influenced in part by the opening of the East and West Falls Church Metro stations just outside City boundaries, but this growth was limited by the amount of available

vacant land. This level of growth became even smaller during the 1990s as the number of vacant parcels declined.

1970s - Vietnamese Influence

After the fall of Saigon in 1975, waves of Vietnamese immigrants settled in northern Virginia. The Clarendon area of Arlington was a major focus of Vietnamese settlement, but with the opening of the Clarendon Metro station in 1979, many Vietnamese businesses and households moved west toward Falls Church, particularly around Seven Corners. By 1984, 60 percent of the Vietnamese in the U.S. lived within three miles of Seven Corners. The Eden Center opened in Falls Church in 1984, with many of the businesses that had formerly been in Clarendon.



Figure 3: Tyler Gardens, now Winter Hill, under construction along West Broad Street in the 1940's.



Figure 4: An aerial view of the commercial corridor, facing east along West Broad Street, in the 1970's.

2000s and Beyond – Mixed Use

A substantial number of redevelopment projects have occurred in the City during the last 15 years. Falls Church has benefited from an unprecedented wave of new development and investment that has occurred along its primary commercial corridors (N. and S. Washington Street and W. Broad Street) over the past decade: primarily mixed use, with office, retail, and residential in the same development complex on underutilized infill sites. The opening of Metro's Silver Line provided a further stimulus to growth and development.



Figure 5: 301 West Broad Street opened in 2016, the largest mixed-use project in the City at the time.

Geography of the City

Falls Church is an independent city located approximately seven miles west of the nation's capital. This proximity has been a major influence on its development. Falls Church is small in area (2.3 square miles) and population (approximately 13,900 as of the 2015 Census estimate); its center remains at the junction of Route 7 (Broad Street) and Route 29 (Washington Street/Lee Highway). The City is bounded by Arlington County and Fairfax County and is roughly equidistant from the major commercial centers of Ballston in Arlington County and Tysons in Fairfax County.

In January 2014, the City boundary with Fairfax County was adjusted to include the property yard and approximately 34.62 acres of land. The area includes the joint George Mason High School / Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School Campus. With this change, the City has legal jurisdiction over the entire site. By agreement with Fairfax County, up to 30 percent of the land can be used for new commercial development. The remainder must be for educational purposes.

The City is serviced by several major transportation links, including I-66, the East and West Falls Church Metro Stations, and the W&OD Trail. I-66 connects the City to the Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor, Washington, D.C., and the Capital Beltway. The East and West Falls Church Metro Stations provide connections to the Metro Orange Line and Silver Line, which run through the Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor, Washington, D.C., Tysons, and Reston. The W&OD Trail is the spine of the region's bike network and provides connection to many surrounding communities.

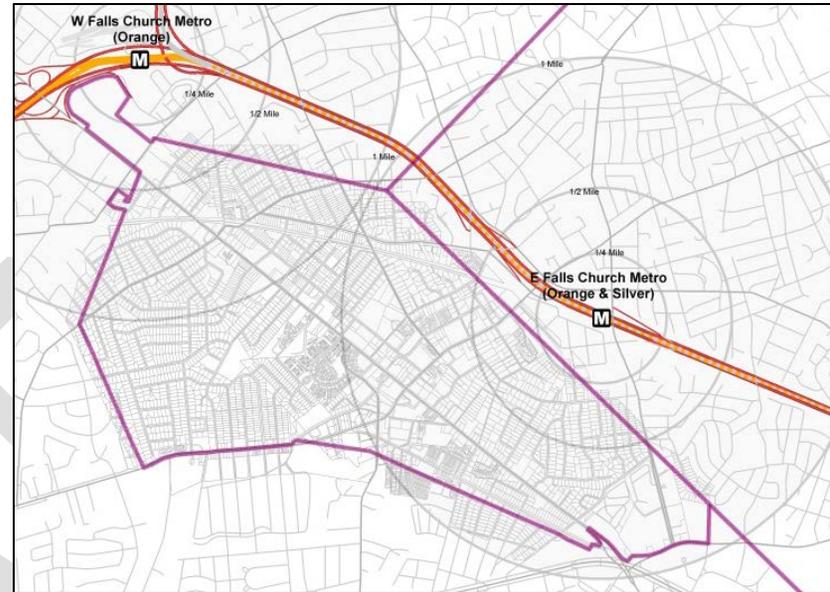


Figure 6: The City of Falls Church.

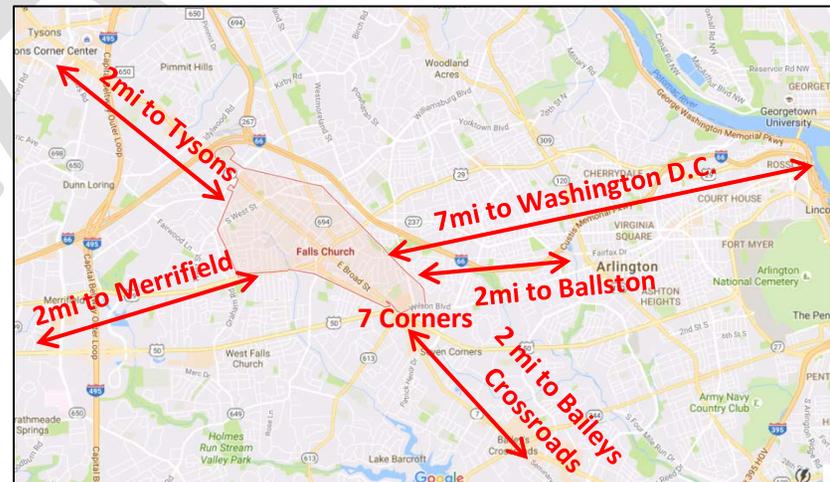


Figure 7: Regional map showing the City of Falls Church in relation to the region.

Planning the City: Past, Present, and Future

Planning Past

In 1934 Fairfax County, including a portion of what would become the City of Falls Church, adopted a zoning ordinance pursuant to the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Master Plans were subsequently adopted by the City in 1947, 1959, 1978, 1988, 1997, and 2005. The 1947 and 1959 Master Plans were comprised of a series of maps with no text, whereas the 1978 and 1988 Plans contained limited text including primary and secondary policy objectives and brief descriptions of programs and activities to achieve those objectives. The 1997 and 2005 Comprehensive Plans went into much greater detail about existing conditions within the City. These plans were also the first to cover topic areas such as historic preservation and community character.

Prior to 2000, a number of planning-related studies were completed by City staff and consultants.

1980s

- Draft Master Plan Review: Land Uses in the City's Business Areas, October 1984 (Planning Department)
- North Washington Street Corridor Special Strategy Area Report, Phase I, January 1986 (Planning Department)
- East Falls Church Land Use Study, January, 1986 (Arlington County Department of Community Affairs, Housing and Community Development Division, Planning Section)
- The Arlington-Falls Church Ad-Hoc Planning Committee, Final Report, June 1987

- South Washington Street Corridor Special Strategy Area Report, Phase I, July 1987 (Planning Department)
- Central Business District Special Strategy Area Report, Phase I, October 1988 (Planning Department)

1990s

- Fiscal Year 91-92 Master Plan Review: Status Report on Implementation of the Master Plan (Planning Department)
- Building the Vision: The Washington Street Corridor, January 1991 (Hyett-Palma, Inc.)
- The Future of the City: Genesis for Progress in Falls Church - North Washington Street, March 1993 (The Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society)
- Redevelopment in Falls Church: Four Illustrative Opportunities, November, 1997 (David Holmes and Larry Keller)

Planning Present and Recent Past

Comprehensive planning is an ongoing effort. This Comprehensive Plan builds on prior comprehensive plans prepared by the City as well as the Small Area Plans, Master Plans, and other planning documents that have been developed.

Ongoing Review and Update of the Comprehensive Plan

Planning in the City is constantly evolving with changing community preferences and regional conditions. To keep pace with these changes, the City is updating its Comprehensive Plan on an ongoing, chapter-by-chapter basis. Most recently, the following chapters have been updated

- Chapter 6, Transportation, “Mobility for All Modes” (adopted 2014)
- Chapter 7, Parks, Open Space, and Recreation, “Parks for People” (adopted 2015)

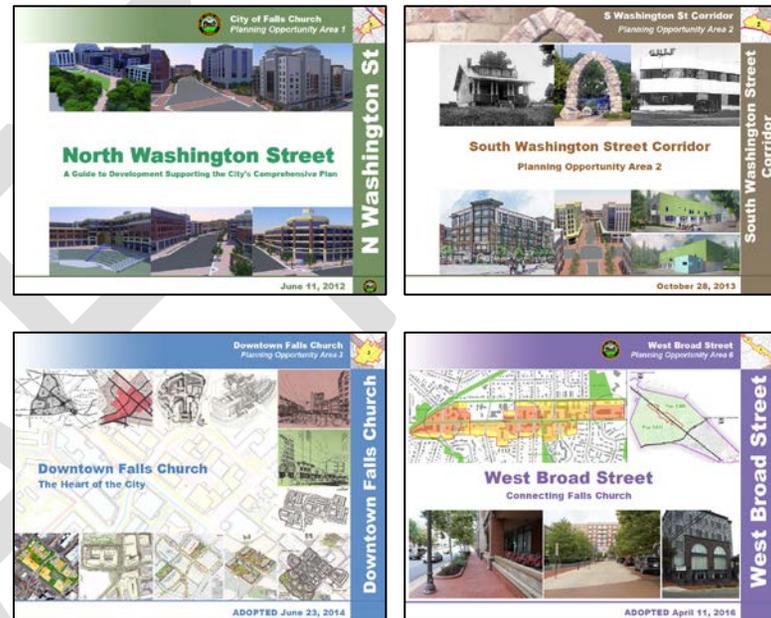


Small Area Plans

The Comprehensive Plan defines several Planning Opportunity Areas (POAs) that are appropriate for additional development or redevelopment. Economic analysis has shown these areas to be critical to the City’s economic sustainability. Accordingly, Small Area Plans have been developed for several of the POAs.

Since 2012, the following Small Area Plans have been adopted:

- North Washington Street Small Area Plan – 2012
- South Washington Street Small Area Plan – 2013
- Downtown Opportunity Area Plan – 2014
- West Broad Street Small Area Plan – 2015

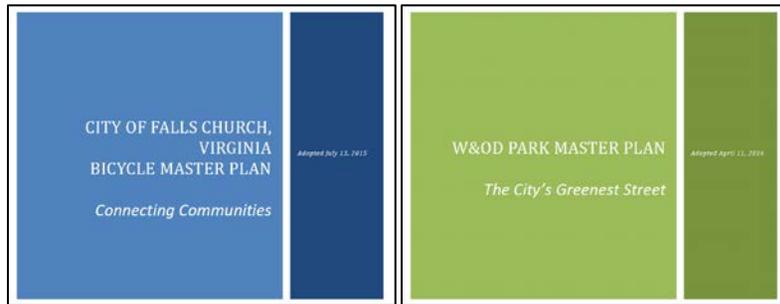
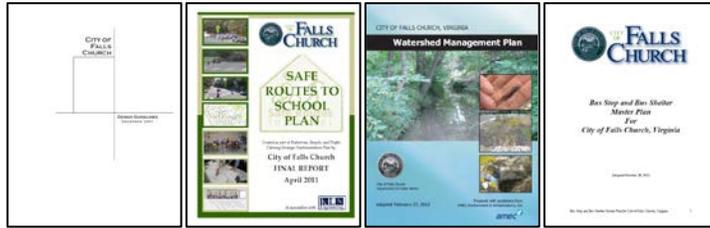


Master Plans

In addition, the City has recently adopted a series of Master Plans. Master Plans focus on specific topic areas and are functional in nature. Like Small Area Plans, they supplement the Comprehensive Plan. A number of them have focused on issues of enhanced mobility. Recently adopted Master Plans include:

- Design Guidelines – 2001
- Safe Routes to School Plan – 2011
- City Council’s Strategic Plan – 2012
- Watershed Management Plan - 2012

- Bus Stop and Bus Shelter Master Plan – 2013
- Bicycle Master Plan: *Connecting Communities* – 2015
- W&OD Master Plan: *The City's Greenest Street* – 2016



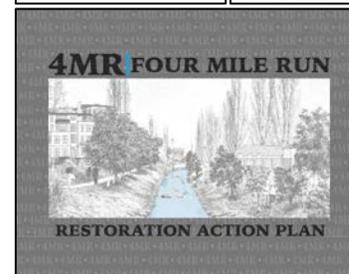
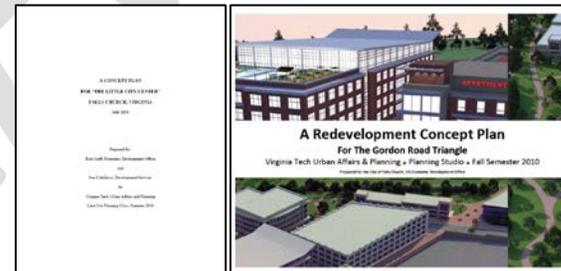
Virginia Tech Partnership

The City has benefited from ongoing collaboration with Virginia Tech, specifically the Urban Affairs and Planning program in Old Town Alexandria. Through class studio projects and individual student capstone projects, the City has been introduced to the latest developments in urban planning. Additionally, several students from that program have worked as interns for the City and/or been hired by the City as full-time staff.

Student studies help the City benefit from the latest thinking in urban planning. The studies themselves are not adopted policies,

but they often inform City planning efforts. Recent studies and reports include the following:

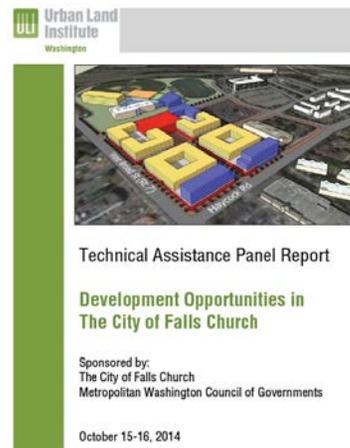
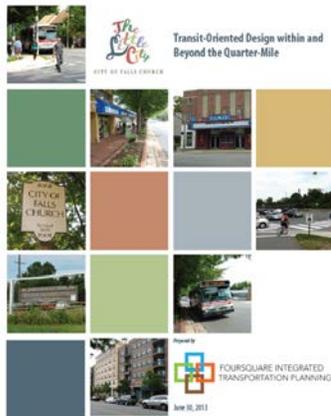
- Eastern Gateway (2009)
- West Jefferson Street (2010)
- Little City Center (2010)
- Gordon Road Triangle (2010)
- Four Mile Run Action Plan (2015)
- The Resourceful City (2017)



Other Studies and Reports

The City benefits from special studies and reports performed by industry experts and in-house staff. Like the student studies, these efforts inform City planning efforts. Recent studies and reports include:

- Falls Church City Center Strategic Plan, February. 2002. Street-Works.
- Transit-Oriented Design within and Beyond the Quarter Mile. 2013. MWCOG Transportation and Land Use Connection (TLC).
- Park Avenue: A Civic Great Street. 2015. In-house staff.
- Development Analysis and Opportunities for Falls Church. 2015. Urban Land Institute Technical Assistance Panel (ULI TAP).



Planning Future

City staff will continue to update the Comprehensive Plan through chapter revisions. They will provide more detailed information through Small Area Plans and Master Plans. This Vision chapter is a revision to Chapter 1. As of this chapter's adoption, other chapters remaining to be updated include: Demographics; Community Character, Appearance, and Design; Land Use and Economic Development; Natural Resources and Environment; Community Facilities, Public Utilities, and Government Services; Historic Preservation; and Housing.

Small Area Plans remaining to be completed include: East End; West End; Gordon Road Triangle; and the School Property.

The Planning Process

City Council, Planning Commission, and staff are committed to engaging the public in the planning process and developing plans and policies that serve the public interest.

For this Vision Chapter, the public involvement process included two public meetings, a public survey, and ad hoc “pop-up” events throughout the City. The draft chapter was circulated to City staff and City Boards and Commissions.

Development of Small Area Plans, Master Plans, and other planning documents involves substantial public involvement, including public meetings, meetings with City Boards and Commissions and City staff, and in some cases public surveys.

In addition to community feedback, the City’s vision is informed by an understanding of regional trends and best practices in planning.



Figure 8: Community Meeting on June 18, 2016



Figure 9: Community Meeting on October 1, 2016

Gathering Input and Feedback

Through a variety of planning events and public engagement tools, City staff collected feedback from hundreds of people. Through the events, people provided feedback on what they value most, what they are concerned about, what changes they would like to see, and what aspects of the City they would like to see preserved. All of the feedback received was used to develop the City’s vision statement and core values.

The pictures on this page and the following summarize some of the inputs received. The tables summarize participation in the planning process.

Table 1: Community Visioning Events

Event	# of Participants	Date
Community Meeting #1	80	June 18, 2016
School Town Hall	125	June 17 and 20, 2016
4 Pop-Ups on Building the Vision	129	August 6, 17, 24, and 31, 2016
Survey	472	August 1 through September 9, 2016
Community Meeting #2	51	October 1, 2016
Pop-Up on Reviewing the Vision	61	November 5, 2016
Total	918	

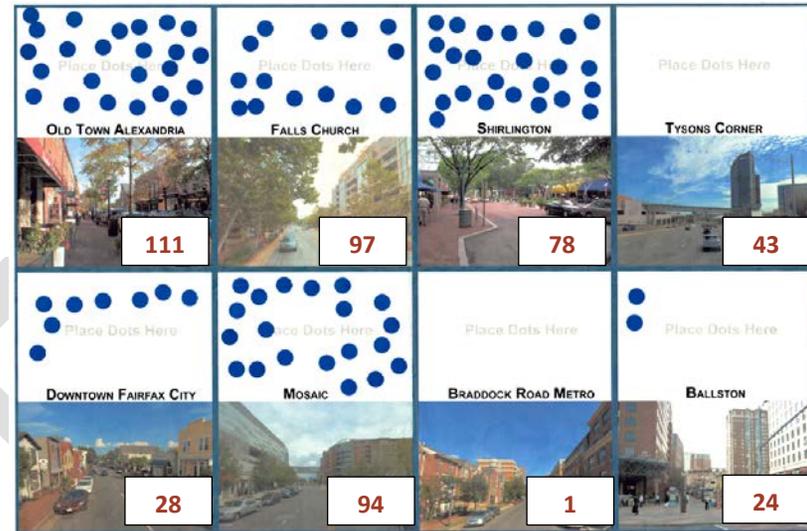


Figure 10: Dot-Voting Results from the June 18, 2016 Community Meeting. Numbers on photos represent total dots placed across all meetings. Each participant was asked to place 3 dots. Approximately 160 people participated.

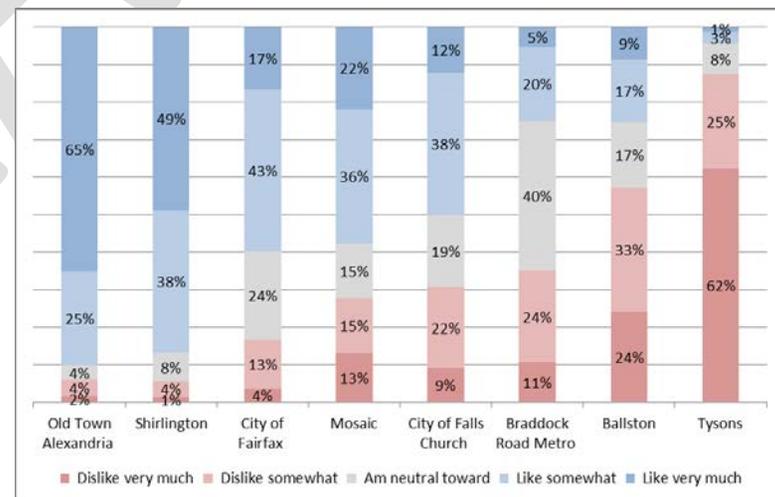


Figure 11: Results from the online survey. A total of 472 responses were received.

Table 2: Council, Planning Commission, and Advisory Group Meetings

Date	Group	Event
September 6, 2016	Planning Commission	Work Session
September 19, 2016	City Council	Work Session
October 24, 2016	City Council	Status Report
November 7, 2016	Planning Commission	Work Session
November 21, 2016	City Council	Work Session
December 6, 2016	Economic Development Authority (EDA)	Work Session
December 7, 2016	Architectural Advisory Board (AAB)	Work Session
December 7, 2016	Recreation & Parks Advisory Board	Work Session
December 14, 2016	Citizens Advisory Committee on Transportation (CACT)	Work Session
December 15, 2016	Arts and Humanities Council	Work Session
December 15, 2016	Environmental Sustainability Council (ESC)	Work Session
December 15, 2016	Human Services Advisory Council (HSAC)	Work Session
January 10, 2017	Housing Commission	Work Session
January 12, 2017	Chamber of Commerce	Work Session
January 17, 2017	Planning Commission	Work Session
January 18, 2017	Tree Commission	Work Session
January 26, 2017	Historical Commission	Work Session
January 26, 2017	Historic Architecture Review Board	Work Session
February 6, 2017	Planning Commission	Public Hearing and Action
February 21, 2017	City Council	Work Session
February 27, 2017	City Council	Public Hearing and Action

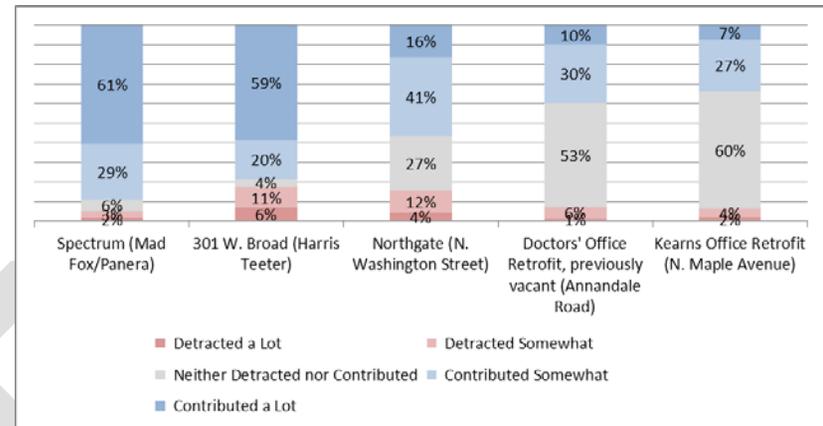


Figure 12: Results from the online survey showed strong support for recently completed projects. Text comments on the survey expressed concern for the future look and feel of the City.

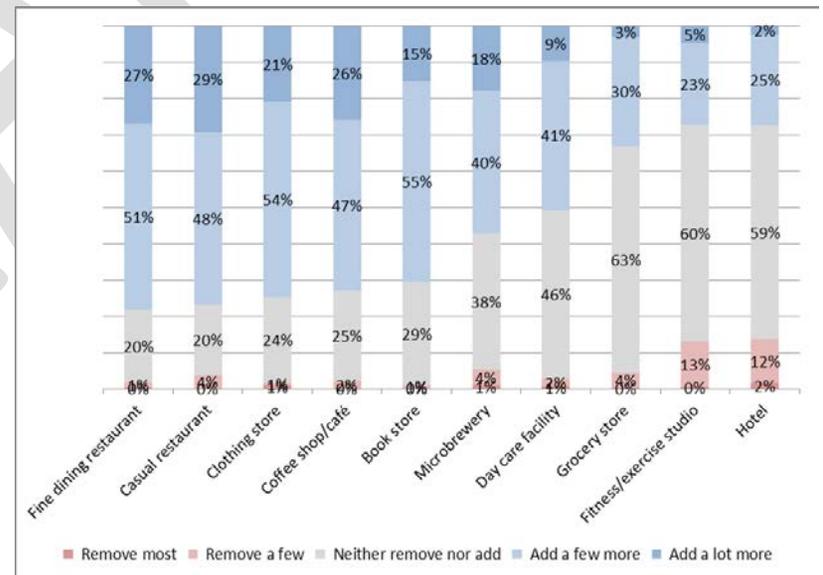


Figure 13: Results from the online survey revealed broad desire for more retail options.

Vision and Core Values

The Vision for the City of Falls Church is as follows:

In the year 2040, the City of Falls Church is the Little City in northern Virginia. It's a vibrant city that provides local shopping and dining opportunities in a walkable and safe setting. The City values inclusiveness and its small-town character and celebrates its history. The City invests in its schools, residential & commercial neighborhoods, and parks & environment. The City's high quality of life is supported by the continual rejuvenation of commercial areas, which is made possible by a growing population and economy.

Inherent in this Vision Statement is a set of core values that embody what the City of Falls Church is striving to achieve over the next 25 years. That set of core values is listed here.



Small-Town Character in an Urban Setting

- Community involvement and spirit
- Festivals and events
- Historic preservation
- Revitalization districts as focal points
- Substantial investment in the arts



Economic Sustainability

- Flourishing commercial base
- Business development
- Skilled labor force
- Regional attractions and tourism economy
- Public-private collaboration



Environmental Sustainability

- Parks and open spaces for recreation and the environment
- A lush urban forest
- Safe, breathable air
- Swimmable, fishable streams
- Zero waste
- Energy efficiency/reduction in GHG emissions



Inclusiveness and Social Sustainability

- Diverse housing stock for all income levels
- Services and facilities for all ages and abilities
- Celebrations of race and culture



Education

- High quality public education and library facilities
- Continued academic excellence
- Opportunities for life-long learning



Mobility and Accessibility

- Travel options to walk, bike, transit, or drive
- Local accessibility and regional mobility
- Regional cooperation and regional solutions



Public Health and Safety

- Ample opportunities for physical activity
- Access to fresh, local foods
- Low crime rates
- Responsive police service
- Access to quality physical and mental health care
- Hazard mitigation



Responsive and Accountable Governance

- Fiscal responsibility
- Accessible and responsive public servants
- High participation with citizen boards and commissions
- Openness and transparency

Applying Core Values

These core values should not be interpreted as headers for subsequent Comprehensive Plan chapters. Rather, they embody principles that should be incorporated and addressed in all chapters.

Community Indicators

Community Indicators track progress against adopted goals. Regular Community Indicators reports allow the City to periodically revisit its adopted goals and assess progress against them.

Indicators should be designed to capture City-wide impacts. Specific actions and remedies are left for further discussion in topical chapters, small area plans, and master plans.

The following draft measures are intended to track City-wide impacts and performance. These should be reported as part of an annual City Community Profile. The number of measures included for each principle as well as the specifics of the measures should be refined through ongoing conversation with the City's advisory boards and commissions.

Small-Town Character in an Urban Setting

- City is walkable and provides for daily needs
- Attendance at local festivals
- Historic buildings and resources preserved and rehabilitated

Economic Sustainability

- Percent of tax revenue from commercial areas
- Job/housing balance (ratio of jobs to people)
- Mix of small and large businesses

Environmental Sustainability

- Acres of parks and open space per capita
- Water quality
- Tree canopy coverage
- Reduction in GHG emissions

Inclusiveness and Social Sustainability

- Percent of housing affordable to different income bands
- Comparison of City demographic profile against regional profile

Education

- Participation rate in advanced primary and secondary school programs
- Graduation rate for ESL or Economically Disadvantaged students
- Percentage of residents with undergraduate and graduate degrees

Mobility and Accessibility

- Transportation mode-share for work trips
- Transportation mode-share for non-work trips for non-work trips

Public Health and Safety

- Number of violent crimes per 100,000 population
- Property damage from hazard events

Responsive and Accountable Governance

- Variance between budgeted and actual expenses
- Number of Board and Commission seat vacancies

How to Use This Plan

This Comprehensive Plan, along with other adopted policy documents, is meant to be used to achieve the overall vision for the City's future. It is the official policy guide for decisions related to public and private investment and is used to evaluate applications for development projects. It is a guide for decision makers to determine what is best for the City's physical and social fabric, including its economy, natural resources, public facilities, transportation network, historic resources, housing, and the use of land.

Comprehensive Plan Structure

The Comprehensive Plan is organized by chapters, which pertain to different subject areas. These topics include community character, land use and economic development, transportation, parks, open space and recreation, historic preservation, and housing, among other important aspects of the City's development and redevelopment.

This vision chapter is the first chapter of the plan. This chapter lays out the overarching vision for the City over the next 20 to 25 years and puts forth the principal values behind that vision. The chapter is followed by a series of interrelated chapters that examine various topics. Goals, strategies, and objectives in subsequent chapters should reinforce and support the vision and principles defined in this chapter.