

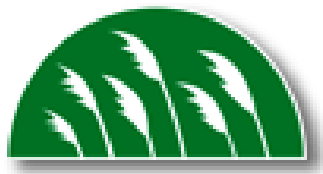
# **Community Visioning in Prince William County's Occoquan Magisterial District**

## **Final Report and Recommendations**

**Prepared for the  
Occoquan District Supervisor and Planning Commission**

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Prepared by the **Environmental Finance Center**



University of Maryland  
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# Table of Contents

Project Background.....	8
Overview of the Occoquan District.....	8
The Comprehensive Plan.....	10
Projected Growth for Occoquan by 2030.....	11
Creating a Community Vision.....	11
The Survey Process.....	11
Summary of Survey Results.....	12
Community Visioning Charrette.....	14
SWOT Analysis.....	14
Strengths.....	15
Weaknesses.....	16
Opportunities.....	18
Threats.....	19
Mapping Exercise.....	21
Assumptions.....	21
Method.....	21
Mapping Outcomes.....	22
General Trends.....	22
Area 1: Route 123/Old Bridge Road.....	22
Area 2: Tackett’s Mill.....	23
Area 3: Caton Hill/Minnieville Road Corridor.....	24
Area 4: Lake Omisol Area.....	24
Area 5: Extended Potomac Mills.....	25
Area 6: Potomac Mills.....	25
Area 7: Chinn.....	26
Area 8: Old Bridge.....	26
Community Review.....	26
General Comments.....	27
Stormwater.....	28
Trails and Open Space.....	28
Tree Preservation.....	29
Obstacles to Redevelopment.....	29
Traffic and Transportation.....	30
Recommendations.....	32
Development and Growth Recommendation.....	32
Undeveloped does not mean unvalued.....	32
Consider a focus on redevelopment.....	32
Incorporate smart growth principles into redevelopment plans.....	32
Natural Resource and Environment Recommendations.....	33

Protect existing open spaces..... 33  
Improve the accessibility of existing open spaces and public use areas..... 33  
Preserve and enhance tree canopy..... 33  
Transportation Recommendations ..... 33  
    Improve opportunities for alternatives to vehicular transportation..... 33  
Conclusion ..... 35  
The EFC Project Team..... 36  
Appendices..... 37  
    Appendix A: Zoning Map..... 38  
    Appendix B: Transportation Improvements Map ..... 39  
    Appendix C: Occoquan District Ariel Base Map..... 40  
    Appendix D: Citizen Input Composite Map..... 41  
    Appendix E: List of November Charrette Attendees ..... 42  
    Appendix F: List of January Charrette Follow-Up Attendees ..... 43

# Executive Summary

## ***Introduction***

The Occoquan District is located in Prince William County in the northern part of Virginia. Bordered to the north by the Occoquan River/Reservoir, the Occoquan District covers 11.4 square miles (7,309 acres). Located at the edge of the Coastal Plain, the landscape is characterized by fragile soils, steep slopes, wooded areas, and a significant network of streams. Interstate 95 runs through the eastern-most portion of the District, which creates both challenges and opportunities for planning and development initiatives.

Certain critical issues currently affect the Occoquan District including conserving and protecting natural beauty and environmentally sensitive areas; expanding transportation choices to include public transit, pedestrian and non-motorized opportunities; providing housing choices that accommodate the full-range of residents from diverse social, cultural, and financial backgrounds; and supporting a broad array of business enterprises, including locally-owned businesses.

Current Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) demographics for Prince William County project that by the year 2030 the Occoquan District will have more than 7,000 new residents, 2,500 new households, 6,560 new jobs and additional retail, office space, and other development including schools, hospitals, and churches in the area.

Since planning for future growth is a long-term process which involves significant time and effort, a proactive approach to addressing anticipated growth in the Occoquan District was a top priority for the Occoquan District Supervisor, Michael C. "Mike" May, and the Planning Commissioner, Kim Hosen. Immediate action was needed to create a vision that included input from the entire community. Deciding how the Occoquan District should look through the next few decades requires residents to be part of the entire process of creating a true community vision.

## ***Creating a Community Vision***

With the assistance of the Environmental Finance Center (EFC) located at the University of Maryland, a Community Visioning Charrette was specifically designed for the Occoquan District. The goal of the Charrette was to gather information from the community, initially through a general survey, followed by a facilitated public meeting that included hands-on exercises. The EFC used this data to make recommendations intended to serve as the basis for a long-term, sustainable community plan for the Occoquan District.

A general survey was designed to collect pertinent information about community impressions regarding growth and development; natural resources and the environment; and transportation. The survey was mailed to more than 12,000 residents in addition to being made available on-line. The survey results showed respondents believed the Occoquan District was a great place to

live and raise a family. Survey responses also indicated the biggest challenges facing the area were transportation, population growth and open space preservation.

The next step in creating a long-term plan was to present the survey results to constituents and gather additional information regarding preservation and/or growth of undeveloped land, existing development and transportation. A Community Visioning Charrette was held on November 15, 2008 at Lake Ridge Middle School in Woodbridge, Virginia. The event was open to the public and approximately 50 district residents and staff were in attendance. The Charrette began with an overview of the trends identified by the survey and the concerns to be addressed in the Occoquan District. Participants then proceeded into randomly assigned breakout sessions for a facilitated discussion and hands-on mapping exercises. Each of the five breakout groups began by conducting a SWOT Analysis which took a closer look at the strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O), and threats (T) facing the Occoquan District. The SWOT exercise allowed residents to voice their opinions while providing invaluable input regarding perceptions and expectations for the future of the Occoquan District and to identify areas in need of attention.

The results of the SWOT Analysis indicated that residents felt a very strong connection to their community. Residents identified many positive attributes perceived to enhance the quality of life in the Occoquan District. The area boasts state and nationally recognized schools and low-crime rates. Many of the neighborhoods have mature trees, large amounts of open space, and recreational facilities which residents value and enjoy. District residents appreciate the convenient proximity to amenities such as churches, hospitals and other medical services. There are a variety of shopping choices within the district including a retail outlet center, Potomac Mills Mall.

Traffic and congestion were often cited as a weakness by participants. Residents reported difficulty accessing community amenities due to traffic and congestion and a lack of alternative modes of transportation. Concerns about the location of commercial developments adding to local traffic, aging infrastructure without adequate upgrades, and proposed future development, were among the potential threats which could prove detrimental if not addressed.

Once the SWOT Analysis was completed in the breakout session, groups were given three large laminated maps: a Zoning Map, a Transportation Improvements Map, and an Occoquan District Ariel Base Map (Appendix A, B and C, respectively). These maps were used to help participants better visualize the factors influencing the decision-making process, including current zoning, slopes, environmentally-sensitive areas, existing traffic patterns, and existing development, as well as allow participants to prioritize areas for future growth. Groups then used toy building blocks of varying size and color that represented total projected growth for the area by 2030. Photos of housing, offices, and retail were shown as visual images that represented real world application for the toy building blocks. Markers and various colored dots were used to identify potential trails, green space, locations for tree plantings and preservation areas, traffic hot spots, and other recreational features.

At the beginning of the breakout session there was a strong preference by participants to have future housing consist mostly of large-lot single-family homes and many were opposed to any increase in other housing types within the Occoquan District. During the mapping session, however, all five breakout groups identified that it was near impossible to accommodate the number of future households expected in the area with only single-family homes without jeopardizing valued and protected areas which all groups and the majority of survey respondents expressed as a priority.

Ultimately, the groups used the mapping tools to incorporate mixed-use structures, with retail and office space below and multi-family housing above, into certain sectors. Generally, participants avoided expanding new development into undeveloped areas and, instead, prioritized areas where redevelopment could accommodate new growth. New hiking trails, areas for open space preservation, a new teen center, and paths for alternative modes of transportation were also marked on the maps. Data from all five groups were compiled into one composite map illustrating all significant recommendations.

### **Outcomes**

Based on the compilation of the survey results and input received at the Community Visioning Charrette, the EFC Project Team found some real and immediate opportunities for the Occoquan District – recommendations that would help take the first steps toward meeting both short-term goals and plan for meeting longer-term goals. For example, there are undeveloped areas in the Occoquan District that clearly hold enormous value to the residents. These areas should remain intact and protected from future development. Additionally, instead of focusing on existing undeveloped areas, new development planning should prioritize redevelopment opportunities and incorporate smart-growth principles such as walkability, mixed-use structures, condensed growth and alternative modes of transportation. Emphasis should be given to improving the internal and external connectivity of any new development plans, whether the development is housing, retail, office or open space.

Protecting existing open spaces and enhancing the natural resources of the area are a top priority for Occoquan District residents who place great value on the area's natural beauty. Whenever possible, these areas should be protected and expanded. Improvements should also be made to increase public access to recreational activities including hiking trails and parks. The area along the water's edge, for example, would be an excellent location to begin adding low-impact, multi-use or recreational trails.

To the greatest extent possible, existing wooded areas should remain untouched and, whenever possible, new trees should be added. Additionally, residents felt tree preservation should be an integral consideration in any future redevelopment plan.

The lack of walkability in the Occoquan District was of considerable concern for residents. Development of a mobility plan for the area that incorporates multi-use paths that can be used for walking, biking or recreation could help meet resident expectations. This could be done in

stages over a period of years with an overall plan that focuses on connectivity to existing trails and residential and retail development.

### **Conclusion**

To a certain extent, growth is inevitable, and the MWCOG demographic projections suggest that the Occoquan District is no exception. However, taking proactive steps to address anticipated growth and incorporating the voice of residents in the planning process can address community concerns, head off potential problems, and create a unified, cohesive vision for the future. This type of collaborative effort will ensure that the Occoquan District is a place where community members will continue to live, work, play, and retire happily for decades to come.

# Project Background

The Occoquan District serves as a gateway to Prince William County. Knowing that planning for growth is a long-term process that takes significant time and effort, District Supervisor Mike May and Planning Commissioner Kim Hosen sought to be proactive in properly planning for this anticipated growth and took steps towards keeping their community a place where residents would want to live, work, play, and retire for many years to come.

These Occoquan District leaders also recognized that action by public officials alone would not result in a sustainable solution. Successful long-term planning requires building a vision for the future as well as the commitment of the entire community. In order to gain public confidence and credibility necessary for future planning and implementation, the District Supervisor strongly felt the decision-making process must be community-driven. Supervisor May and Ms. Hosen wanted residents to help create, implement, and sustain their own vision of the how the Occoquan District should look through the next few decades.

With this core objective in mind, much thought was given to the most effective way for residents to provide input on critical issues affecting the community, such as conservation, transportation, housing, and business growth. The intent was to put the needs of existing communities first by keeping them safe, affordable, an attractive places to live. This objective, coupled with concerns for how projected population increases and expanded growth might change the Occoquan District initiated interest in a Community Visioning Charrette to plan now for future growth.

The Environmental Finance Center at the University of Maryland (EFC) was contacted in late summer 2008 with a request for assistance in planning a Community Visioning Charrette. The EFC was chosen for this endeavor based a number of qualifications. Occoquan District leaders wanted the final community vision to be a true product of the community without biases. Therefore, the EFC was chosen as the impartial third-party to ensure a non-biased approach.

The goal of the Charrette was to gather information from the community, initially through a general survey, followed then by a facilitated public meeting that included hands on exercises. The EFC would use this data to make recommendations that could serve as the basis for a long term, sustainable community plan for the Occoquan District.

## ***Overview of the Occoquan District***

The Occoquan District is a suburban locality in eastern Prince William County, Virginia. Bordered to the north by Fairfax County, the west by Loudoun County and the south by Stafford County, the Occoquan District covers nearly 11.4 square miles (7,309 acres). Located at the edge of the Coastal Plain, the landscape is characterized by fragile soils, steep slopes, wooded areas and a significant network of streams. Interstate 95 runs through the eastern-most portion of the District, which creates both challenges and opportunities for planning and development



initiatives. Just 20 miles south of Washington, DC, midway between Fort Belvoir and Marine Corps Base Quantico, the Occoquan District is a convenient location for government and military personnel to live.

As of December 2007, Prince William County had an estimated population of 386,047, making it the third most populous jurisdiction in Virginia. This population represents a 37.5% increase from the 2000 population census which listed 280,813 residents. Prince William County is projected to have a population of 555,012 by 2030.<sup>1</sup>

In 2005, the most current demographic data set available for the Occoquan District, an estimated 37,095 people lived in 13,215 households within the District. In addition, 15,404 people were employed in the Occoquan District in 2005; of these, 1,483 were employed in the industrial sector, 8,135 were employed in the retail sector, 4,122 were employed in the office sector, and 1,664 were employed in other sectors.<sup>2</sup>

Residents of the District enjoy a number of amenities. Communities located within the area managed by the Lake Ridge Homeowners Association, the largest home owners' association in the Occoquan District, benefit from an established network of green open space and private parkland. The District is also home to the Chinn Park Aquatic and Fitness Center, which includes soccer fields and a hiking trail. The 70-acre Lake Ridge Park, also in the Occoquan District, hosts a par-three golf course, playground, and nature trail. In addition, the Prince William County Park Authority leases ball fields from the American Legion and residents benefit from parkland in adjacent magisterial districts, including the nearby Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

The Occoquan District also lays claim to the sole public access point in Prince William County to the Occoquan Reservoir, a significant regional drinking water supply and recreation amenity. The buffer area along the Occoquan Reservoir within the county is largely developed, limiting future opportunities to secure additional public access points. Approximately 40% of Prince William County lands drain directly into the Occoquan Reservoir, including nearly all of the Occoquan District.

The Town of Occoquan is located on the south bank of the Occoquan River in the northeastern corner of the Occoquan District. Formally established as a town in 1804, the Town of Occoquan was designated a Historic Landmark in 1983. Many buildings in the downtown historic district are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Accessible by road (Route 123/Gordon Boulevard runs along the east of the town), trail (the East Coast Greenway, a 2,600 mile shared-use path, was dedicated in May 2007) and water, the quaint downtown district is home to a thriving artists' community. According to the 2000 census, 759 individuals, 418 households and 186 families lived in the Town of Occoquan.

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<sup>1</sup> Prince William County 2008 Comprehensive Plan.

<sup>2</sup> Data from the Prince William County Planning Department.

The Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC) provides public transportation in the Occoquan District via OmniRide (the inter-county commuter bus service), and OmniLink (a weekday intra-county bus service). The Horner Road Commuter Lot, Old Hechinger's (Route 123/Old Bridge Road) Commuter Lot and the newly-renovated Tacketts Mill Commuter Lot are three commuter facilities in the eastern end of the Occoquan District that provide convenient parking for commuters and facilitate ride-sharing opportunities, such as "slug lines." Additionally, residents have access to the Virginia Railway Express (VRE) commuter rail services, located just outside the Occoquan District, which provides service from Fredericksburg and Manassas to Union Station in Washington, DC.

The Occoquan District offers a diversity of housing types. Although residential communities are largely characterized by single-family and town homes, multi-family homes are also found throughout the District and more recent development approvals are expected to increase the range of opportunities available to residents.

The Occoquan District is also home to a large retail outlet center. The area, known as Potomac Mills, is a thriving commercial retail center that includes Potomac Mills Mall, the largest single-floor mall in Virginia and the second largest mall in the Washington, DC region behind Tyson's Corner. With 1.6 million square feet of retail space, Potomac Mills Mall is the second largest taxpayer in the County behind Dominion Power, providing the District with a strong tax base and creating significant opportunities to attract additional commercial uses.

### ***The Comprehensive Plan***

The Prince William County 2008 Comprehensive Plan creates a vision for the future of the county, and is used as a guideline for evaluating and negotiating development applications. Infrastructure improvements funded through the County's Capital Improvements Project budget are expected to further the vision established in the Comprehensive Plan.

The County's Comprehensive Plan enumerates four general goals for the future development of Prince William County. The goals of the Comprehensive Plan are as follows:

1. Strong economic growth.
2. Residential and economic development which is affordable, practical, and fiscally sound. Infill development, mixed-use, and development of already developed areas are encouraged, in order to maximize the efficiency of existing infrastructure.
3. Prince William County as an attractive, "livable" community.
4. Cost-effective and plan-based transportation systems, such as regional mass transportation "hubs" with high-density mixed use and transit-oriented land uses.

The Comprehensive Plan encourages the creation of mixed-use projects in appropriate locations throughout Prince William County, and defines mixed-use projects as “planned developments that encourage and accommodate a mix of land uses” which “provide an efficient development pattern that can foster economic development, provide diversity in land use, and reduce the number and the length of automobile trips”.

### ***Projected Growth for Occoquan by 2030***

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG), a federally-designated regional organization of 21 Washington, DC-metro area governments, has forecasted more than 7,000 new residents, in 2,500 new households, as well as 6,560 new jobs for the Occoquan District. This growth in employment is expected to require 854,100 ft<sup>2</sup> of additional retail space, 1,342,800 ft<sup>2</sup> of additional office space, 216,000 ft<sup>2</sup> of additional space for other development (including government, schools, hospitals, churches), and a 67,200 ft<sup>2</sup> decrease of industrial space. Accommodating the projected growth in an efficient and effective manner promises to be challenging without some type of plan in place to guide this anticipated growth.

## **Creating a Community Vision**

Developing a Community Vision is an effective way for community members to become involved and have a voice in overcoming challenges at the neighborhood scale and providing direction to help guide the community along a path that reflects the goals of a majority of residents. It also gives residents, business owners, and elected officials an opportunity to work together in planning for improvements and meeting community needs.

The visioning process used by the Occoquan District consisted of three parts. The first part made use of a survey to collect information prior to any community event in order to prioritize the concerns and views on certain issues affecting the Occoquan District. The second part of the process was to host a public meeting whereby residents and businesses could participate in a facilitated discussion aimed at identifying potential growth scenarios. The third and final part required the synthesis of information collected in the survey and the public meeting to compile a report which reflected the overall view of community members with regard to future growth in the Occoquan District. A final meeting was held to review the draft report with the community and provide an additional opportunity for community members to comment on the findings.

## **The Survey Process**

The EFC began the visioning process by developing a survey designed to collect pertinent information about community impressions regarding growth and development; natural resources and the environment; and transportation. The goal of the survey was to collect as

much information as possible prior to the scheduled November Charrette in an effort to gauge the priorities, concerns and interests of the residents of the Occoquan District. The citizens were given six weeks to respond to the survey. The survey results were collected and summarized for use at the Charrette and for the final report.<sup>3</sup>

### **Summary of Survey Results**

The survey was comprised of questions regarding participants' opinions about the quality of life and current and projected growth in the District. Two hundred forty-eight people responded to all or part of the survey, 60% of whom were male, 65% of whom were over the age of 45, and 76% of whom have an annual household income of \$80,000 or greater. Seventy-nine percent of respondents had an associate's degree or higher, and there were respondents from all nine precincts in the District, with the most (32%) from the Lake Ridge precinct.

Close to a quarter of the respondents are retired, but most of the rest (almost 46% of the total) work outside the Occoquan District in Arlington or Fairfax Counties in Virginia, or Washington, D.C.

Over 85% rated the Occoquan District as an "excellent" or "good" livable community and 55% are very satisfied with living in the District. Sixty-two percent think that the District is a good place for children, though 57% think it is "somewhat good" for young adults; over 67% think it is a "good" place to be an adult and almost half think it is a "good" place to be a senior citizen.

According to respondents, the top two challenges facing the Occoquan District are traffic and excessive population growth. Transportation, population growth and open space preservation ranked as the highest priority community growth and development issues.<sup>4</sup> Cultural and historic preservation and the availability of high quality services were the lowest ranked issues. In a later question, 47% said that cultural and historic preservation was very important.

Seventy-seven percent and 66% think that population growth and development, respectively, are happening too fast. Over 45% responded that they do not want to see any new development in the Occoquan District. Forty-five percent would prefer that new development occur in densely developed areas as opposed to sparsely developed areas, open space, forested space, or agricultural space. Further, over 75% responded that it was "very important" for new development to avoid ecologically important or sensitive areas.

Half are "very satisfied" with the availability of services in the Occoquan District; when asked what businesses are most needed in the District assuming that new development will occur, the top three choices were Class A Office/white collar employment, restaurants/eateries, and

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<sup>3</sup> The survey was mailed out to 12,000 residents as well as made available in electronic format via an Internet survey service.

<sup>4</sup> Population Growth was offered as a choice for this question, but ranked lower than transportation or "other."

corporate employment. Over 48% would like to see independently-owned shops, as opposed to big box retailers or other chain stores and restaurants.

Thirty-seven percent “somewhat support” the incorporation of mixed-use development in the Occoquan District, but close to one-third opposes it. Over 56% preferred mixed-use with residential, retail, and office uses together, when asked to choose between this model of neighborhood, purely residential of one type, and purely residential of mixed types (e.g. single-family homes and apartments, etc). Over 48% would prefer to see single-family homes on lots larger than ½ acre, versus single-family homes on lots smaller than ½ acre, townhouses, townhouses divided into apartments, or regular apartments. Forty-five percent would oppose more affordable housing in the District, and 49% would oppose a move toward providing a greater variety of housing.

Sixty-four percent of respondents were “somewhat satisfied” with the efforts to maintain or revitalize older developments in the Occoquan District. Among all respondents, 48 wrote in an optional text box which area(s) they would like to see revitalized; ten (approximately four percent of total respondents) said some portion of Route 1. Given nine options for the development of office space within Eastern Prince William County, the top three choices were Route 1, near Potomac Mills, and Route 123 south of the exit for I-95

When asked to select two open space elements for incorporation in their neighborhoods, respondents chose walking/hiking trail and undeveloped green open space as their top two choices by far. Eighty-one percent consider the preservation of forests and planting of trees in the Occoquan District to be very important. Eighty-three percent think the preservation of open space is very important in the District, and 90% responded that they would support increased open space requirements for new developments. Ninety-three percent would support tree preservation requirements for new developments.

About 78% of respondents think that the availability of parks and recreational areas in the District are “very important” and 59% are “somewhat satisfied” with existing parks and recreational areas in the District. The vast majority, 70% would prefer many smaller neighborhood parks with fewer amenities to one larger regional park with more amenities. When asked to choose two elements of parks/open space among a field of ten, biking/walking trails received 76% of the vote, trailed by a nature center with 31%.

Eighty-eight percent of respondents consider water quality in local streams, rivers, and reservoirs to be “very important,” and about two-thirds are only “somewhat satisfied” with the state of local streams. Eighty percent would support the development of a watershed management plan in the Occoquan District.

Over 46% of respondents were not satisfied with automobile travel in and around their community, with 84% saying that there is too much traffic/congestion. More than 56% are not satisfied with their options for non-motorized travel and 68% would support efforts to start a trolley or enhance the local bus system within the District. Almost 92% of respondents do not

use OmniLink intra-county bus service; the most common reasons cited were that the timing and location of stops are not convenient. Sixty-five percent would support bus service to points outside the Occoquan District. More than half of respondents indicated that they travel outside the District on a daily basis, with 57% opposing HOT Lanes on I-95.

Biking/walking trails emerged again as a top vote-getter when respondents were asked about their desired amenities for Eastern Prince William County; 65% of respondents chose them. Open space and parks, fields, and playgrounds rounded out the top three choices, both garnering about 46%.

## Community Visioning Charrette

After a series of strategy meetings and conference calls with Occoquan officials and pertinent Prince William County departments, a Community Visioning Charrette was held on November 15, 2008 at Lake Ridge Middle School in Woodbridge, Virginia. The event was open to the public and more than 50 people attended.

The Community Visioning Charrette began with an introduction by Occoquan District Supervisor Mike May. Supervisor May explained that he hoped the participants would generate ideas about how the community should look throughout the next 30 years. He stated that the District was expected to add over 2,500 new households and many new jobs, and the goal of the day's meeting was to consider how best to balance and accommodate this influx of growth with land-use planning.

Occoquan District Planning Commissioner Kim Hosen framed out the planning issues and concerns that the District must/should consider, highlighting the District's location as both an asset and a challenge. While the location as a whole has a strong natural resource base; and, while areas such as Lake Ridge have a good deal of open space, some parts of the Occoquan District are more challenging. For example, Potomac Mills provides a significant tax benefit to the District, but also presents severe traffic congestion. There are large amounts of undeveloped land in the District and moving forward it is vital to make decisions that balance the use of this land with any unintended impacts, such as traffic congestion.

### **SWOT Analysis**

As part of the planning process to assist the Occoquan District in developing a community-driven vision for planning to the year 2030, a closer examination of resources and capabilities was needed to determine areas in the District function effectively and those in need of improvement. The EFC project team conducted a *SWOT* Analysis to examine both the internal and external factors affecting the community. The term *SWOT* stands for strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O), and threats (T). Internal factors are identified through an investigation of community strengths and weaknesses, the external factors from opportunities

and threats. Often used by businesses, the SWOT Analysis method helps create an effective strategic plan.

### **Strengths**

During the breakout session, participants were asked to think about the areas within the Occoquan District they perceive as assets and discuss the overall strengths that make those areas more competitive compared to others. They were also asked to think beyond their own neighborhood and consider the District as a whole and what makes certain places more appealing than others. For example, is it the transportation options available in the area? the scale or extent of development? Is it the specific amenities offered there? the amount of open space and access to natural areas?

Overall, Occoquan residents reported a strong sense of community centered on the strengths of the District. Amenities, including recreational facilities, hospitals, churches, and retail choices were reasons for locating in the District. Residents also perceived their community to have a lower crime rate and a better educational system than other communities in the region. The population is relatively stable and the Town of Occoquan is a quaint historic area that is right on the water.

#### ***Development Strengths***

Occoquan is home to a large retail district known as Potomac Mills. Easily accessible from the Prince William County Parkway and Interstate 95, Potomac Mills attracts consumers from the entire region. Charrette participants also viewed the steady tax base this area provides the Occoquan District as an economic plus.

The historic Town of Occoquan is a tourist attraction and a cultural hub for visitors with its picturesque 18<sup>th</sup> Century-style shop buildings and proximity to the Occoquan River. This provides the area with elevated economic status. In fact, this area boasts one of the top ten income levels in the country.

Housing choices in the Occoquan District vary. There are numerous single-family housing developments with strong homeowner associations representing the interests of their residents. Multi-family housing units add to the range of options available to residents. The Occoquan District is home to a large number of government employees including many military personnel since it is located equal distance between two military bases, Marine Corps Base Quantico and Fort Belvoir.

#### ***Natural Resources and the Environment Strengths***

The Occoquan Reservoir is considered a major resource by the community especially as it enables some residents to live near the water without paying exorbitant housing prices. The reservoir also provides an abundant supply of clean drinking water

The Occoquan District has leveraged its location on the Occoquan Reservoir to offer a host of natural resource and recreational activities. As the sole access point in Prince



William County to the Occoquan, the District's Lake Ridge Park is the site of Oxford House, a rowing facility used by local high schools' crew teams and other rowing clubs.

In addition to aquatic environments, Charrette participants, both through survey responses and mapping activities, expressed their desire to protect green space. Several recreation facilities in the Occoquan District establish the balance between recreation and green space, such as a par-3 golf course at Lake Ridge Park, and ball fields at Chinn Park and the American Legion.

Mature trees and wooded areas are interspersed throughout many residential neighborhoods. In particular, participants felt the Lake Ridge and West Ridge areas benefit from a network of green open space. The Occoquan District is also located in close proximity to federal and state parks, including the Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Leesylvania State Park, and Prince William Forest Park.

### ***Transportation Strengths***

The Occoquan District is conveniently located off Interstate 95 and is considered to be within reasonable commuting distance to Washington, D.C., as well as Tyson's Corner and other key Northern Virginia locations. Participants indicated that "slug lines" are an efficient mode of transportation for many residents. "Slug lines" are an informal mode of mass transit, often referred to as "instant carpooling" that allows drivers to pick-up other commuters in designated parking lots through the community in order to make use of the less-congested High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes on the freeway. Three large commuter lots within the District provide easy parking opportunities for residents who take advantage of OmniRide. In addition to personal vehicle options and commuter bus services, there is access to the Virginia Rail Express (VRE) and a local commuter bus service known as the PRTC. Participants also felt that the Occoquan District receives support from Prince William County on transportation projects.

### **Weaknesses**

Following the discussion of community strengths, participants were asked to consider the areas within the Occoquan District they see as problematic or requiring additional attention, work, or redevelopment. Participants were asked to consider problematic areas in the District and provide reasonable explanations for the problems in those areas. For example, is there too much traffic? Is the area unsafe? Is the locale inconvenient? Is the area lacking visual appeal? Is the area overcrowded? The participants were reminded that the exercise was intended to be positive and were encouraged to provide constructive criticism.

### ***Development Weaknesses***

Most residents of the Occoquan District do not work in the District due to what is perceived as a lack of local head-of-household job opportunities. Charrette participants believe that the area has been developing in recent years, but without supporting infrastructure to support new growth. Participants felt area schools offer quality education but are overcrowded and underfunded, diminishing educational potential.



Many participants expressed concern that homes are being built too close to the Reservoir and that neighborhoods are not designed to accommodate people, but rather to accommodate cars. The abundance of cul-de-sacs was felt to foster one-way in and one-way out traffic flows which encourage congestion on primary roads and fragment neighborhoods. Many areas were considered blind streets unsuitable for playing children. Participants also found walking safely and easily in some communities to be difficult due to the lack of sidewalks and disconnected sidewalks.

Looking beyond residential development to commercial areas, some participants expressed frustration over the amount of empty office and retail spaces, particularly in the Tackett's Mill area.

### ***Natural Resource and Environment Weaknesses***

Although there are few large parks in the Occoquan District, Charrette participants supported the addition of neighborhood and pet parks that would be available for public use. Participants expressed concerns about limited access to existing parkland, including privately owned parkland that is not available to the general public. They also noted that some parks require residents to cross busy streets to access entry.

Generally, participants felt there was a lack of pedestrian trails and those which are in existence lacked access points and connections to other trail systems, echoing the connectivity concerns expressed in the assessment of residential development.

### ***Transportation Weaknesses***

The Occoquan District was viewed by participants as a community that lacks transportation variety and requires residents to drive where ever they want to go. In recent years, traffic congestion has become an important concern for many residents.

Old Bridge Road, a major corridor in the Occoquan District, has major congestion issues, particularly during the morning and evening rush hours. Participants felt that the large number of traffic lights added to Prince William Parkway encouraged people to seek alternate routes to I-95, resulting in increased traffic congestion on Old Bridge Road.

Due to safety concerns stemming from the extensive traffic and lack of sidewalks, few if any students have the opportunity to walk to school. In fact, the Prince William County school system transportation policy is based on the premise that no students will walk to school.

Participants also noted that there is a lack of biking, running, and walking trails, almost no bike lanes, and too few sidewalks to promote alternative forms of transportation. Participants added that the closest safe place for recreational biking was in the Prince William Forest Park, but doing so requires driving to the park.

In addition to traffic congestion, parking has become problematic for many commuters. Although there are several commuter lots located in Occoquan which facilitate the use of carpools and public transportation, participants felt that these lots are meeting with mixed success. Between the three commuter lots within the District, 3,670 commuter parking spots are available and quickly fill. In particular, the Horner Road Commuter Lot routinely exceeds capacity.

Participants found the local bus service, Omni-Link, to have limited route offerings. They also believe that the service lacks adequate handicap accommodations. These factors make it particularly difficult for senior citizens to use the system.

## Opportunities

Closely observing the opportunities in the Occoquan District gave the participants a chance to consider external factors that the community could use in order to find ways to benefit from in the future. Participants were asked to look towards the future of the District and identify possible opportunities to be seized and areas that could benefit from redevelopment. Charrette participants were also asked to share their thoughts on areas that should be preserved.

### *Development Opportunities*

Given the Occoquan District's proximity to Interstate 95 and the presence of Potomac Mills to provide an anchor for future commercial development, participants believed that the Occoquan District has a unique opportunity to incorporate more mixed-use development, particularly ground level shops with living units above.

The Occoquan District is home to many retired residents, but offers few services that cater to the aging population. As more Baby Boomers retire and stay in the area, participants saw potential for the Occoquan District to become more "senior friendly", with a greater variety of facilities and services designed to build a sense of community for retired people. Participants hoped the community would improve accessibility to building, public transportation and pedestrian networks, particularly for the disabled.

In addition to improving accessibility for the aging population, participants expressed a desire for more localized retail and grocery outlets so that certain areas of Occoquan, such as Tackett's Mill, could function as a hub for community services rather than a strip mall. Participants also thought future plans could include a multi-use amphitheater for community gatherings.

One of the complaints expressed by Charrette participants was the need to effectively use proffers to cover the cost of infrastructure improvements associated with new development. With the new development or redevelopment that may come to Occoquan through 2030, participants saw an opportunity to increase developer commitments in order to ensure that sufficient funding is available to pay for necessary infrastructure.

Certain areas of Occoquan were noted by participants for their redevelopment opportunities. Tackett's Mill and Old Bridge Road from Minnieville Road to Route 123 were mentioned by many to be such areas.

Several participants expressed concerns about a lack of youth centers and activities in the District. With the expected population growth through 2030, participants said consideration should be given to increasing youth center activities during the summer months, as well as offering more structured youth activities throughout the year.

### ***Natural Resource and Environment Opportunities***

Charrette participants felt that current growth projections present an opportunity to implement stronger natural resource conservation requirements for developers, including adoption of ordinances that protect trees and forests.

Improved connectivity and the need for additional bike and walking trails were repeatedly mentioned by participants. Several suggested the extension and linking of bike trails and pedestrian paths beyond specific neighborhoods would help connect communities and increase non-motorized transportation opportunities. This will be valuable to incorporate into any future planning activities.

Echoing Prince William County's push to "Go Green," Charrette participants suggested incorporating more recycling centers into future plans in an effort to encourage residents to recycle more frequently and in greater numbers.

### ***Transportation Opportunities***

As current traffic and congestion issues are intensified by impending growth, it was suggested by participants that future plans seek and identify opportunities to alleviate traffic hot spots, especially those associated with Old Bridge Road.

Additionally, participants felt that offering increased and expanded bus service, including a reevaluation of current bus routes and schedules, would better serve the local residents and ultimately reduce the number of cars on the road. Again, improved sidewalks, crosswalks, and trail systems were suggested by participants as ways to encourage alternative modes of transportation.

## **Threats**

Threats are generally considered to be changes in the external environment that could become detrimental if not addressed. Charrette participants were asked to consider what might be standing in the way of opportunities and how these issues may be overcome. Are local zoning adjustments needed? Will zoning restrictions help protect open spaces? This was intended to be an exercise in identifying ways to clear potential implementation hurdles.

### ***Development Threats***

Charrette participants expressed concerns regarding the manner in which commercial development is taking place adjacent to quiet, residential areas. This is creating a number of issues, including problematic traffic congestion. Participants are hopeful that planning for future commercial development in the Occoquan District will address this problem. Additionally, participants are also concerned that further development of the Coles District may force traffic through other residential communities in the Occoquan District.

Future threats cited by participants included concerns about a reliance on aging infrastructure without integrating plans for systems upgrades. In fact, all of the proposed future development expected for the Occoquan District was generally seen as a threat by participants. Although most understood that more development was anticipated, the overwhelming majority of participants felt that the Occoquan District should redevelop its existing buildings and business centers before expanding existing developed areas or consuming remaining open spaces

### ***Natural Resource and Environment Threats***

Protecting and improving the green resources of the Occoquan District emerged as a priority from Charrette participants. Participants were also concerned about the approach utility crews take when addressing encroachment of trees. It appeared to participants that there was little regard for where or how trees were pruned or removed, and in the resulting depletion of tree cover.

Charrette participants expressed concerns about increasing pollution in the Occoquan Reservoir and the potential threat to the community's drinking water. Increasing pollution was also perceived to diminish the natural beauty and recreational enjoyment of the Reservoir. Participants recognize that with increased impervious surfaces in the area, comes increased pollution, run off and loss of habitat that threatens water quality, wildlife habitats and recreational opportunities.

### ***Transportation Threats***

Participants agreed that widening Old Bridge Road would reduce traffic congestion in the area; however, many were concerned that this would significantly diminish the visual appeal of this gateway to Prince William County. Widening would also encourage increased development and invite cut-through traffic offsetting any commuting improvements.

Participants felt that the projected population growth and corresponding vehicle use would eventually result in increased traffic congestion and delays, shorter life spans for local roads, and more roadway repairs. Participants were frustrated by a perceived increase in the number of accidents occurring at identified "hot spots" during morning and evening rush hours, and they were concerned that BRAC activities could exacerbate both of these issues.

## Mapping Exercise

Following the *SWOT* Analysis, participants engaged in a practical, hands-on mapping exercise designed to help them conceptualize the impact that projected growth, parks, trails, and other *SWOT* analysis suggestions might have on the community depending on how they are implemented. Three maps of the Occoquan District were enlarged, laminated and given to each breakout group so they could consider many factors influencing the decision-making process, including current zoning, slope and other topographical issues, the location of environmentally sensitive areas, existing traffic patterns, funded transportation projects, and existing development.

## Assumptions

Before beginning the Mapping Activity, some assumptions were made to ensure that all participants were beginning the exercise with the same level of understanding. First, based on the Prince William County 2008 Comprehensive Plan, there will be growth in the Occoquan District in the future. There is expected to be more housing, retail, and offices regardless of the extent to which residents welcome this growth. The most effective manner in which to address any future growth is to develop a community-driven implementation plan. Second, based on the desires and concerns expressed in both the survey and the *SWOT* Analysis, the Occoquan District should consider the following criteria in their community vision:

- Increase and improve parks, trails, and open space
- Increase the number of high-end retail options and amenities
- Significantly improve public transit
- Increase the number of professional office locations in the District
- Alleviate traffic congestion

## Method

The first map was the Occoquan District zoning map. Each group received a set of toy building blocks of varying size and color that represented the total projected growth for the area by 2030. So each group would have a clear visual image of their choices, they were given photos of the types and various sizes of structures and combinations there that the toy building blocks represented in a real world application. Participants were instructed to use this map and the toy building blocks to identify where to direct anticipated new households, offices and retail outlets, as well as identify what types of development should be encouraged. Yellow dots were used to identify areas that had potential for redevelopment.

The second map given to each group was an Occoquan District map that illustrated existing housing, resources such as open space and waterways, and topographical features such as steep slopes. Participants used this map as a point of reference for creating trails, parks, open space, and recreational areas. Various stickers and markers were used to represent different desired natural resource and recreation features.

The third map was from the Virginia Department of Transportation and showed existing traffic and congestion “hot spots.” This map also indicated the location of projects that are slated to receive future funding as well as those currently unfunded. Participants were to determine if all traffic and congestion concerns were adequately addressed and to use red stickers to mark missed areas in need of additional attention.

During this mapping activity, all participants’ comments and feedback were recorded by a designated facilitator. Additionally, participants had the option of using available pens and “sticky” notes to share any additional comments they wanted to relay to local officials.

## Mapping Outcomes

### General Trends

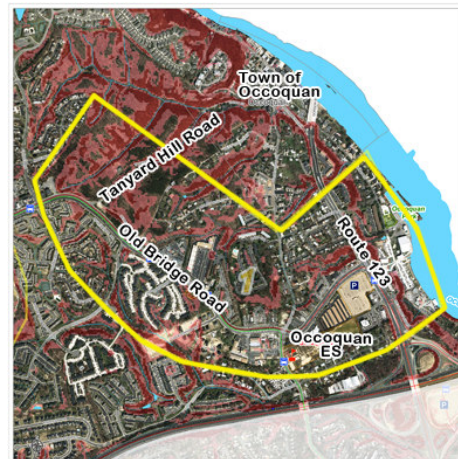
As previously mentioned, many survey respondents initially expressed a desire for new residential development to consist of large-lot single family homes, and an opposition to increasing the variety of housing types in the Occoquan District. However, when the breakout groups attempted to fit all of the anticipated new households into the District strictly with single-family homes, they discovered this was nearly impossible given the limited supply of suitable development acreage. The footprint needed to incorporate 2,806 new single family homes simply does not exist in the Occoquan District, and participants quickly realized that multi-family and mixed-use structures would need to be incorporated into future plans. Ultimately, the mixed-use concept was well-received by participants, although not a single group supported the concept of allowing all of the projected growth to actually take place. There was little interest in rezoning agriculturally-zoned areas to accommodate new growth.

Participants identified areas in the Occoquan District perceived as suitable for redevelopment. The groups believed incorporating mixed-use structures in the redevelopment of these areas would accommodate more new growth while compromising less existing open space in the District. In particular, the groups identified the area around the intersection of Route 123 and Old Bridge Road, Tackett’s Mill, and Potomac Mills as those with the greatest redevelopment potential and suggested redevelopment take place in these areas prior to implementing any new development.

### Area 1: Route 123/Old Bridge Road

According to Charrette participants, the Route 123/Old Bridge Road area was a strong candidate for redevelopment due to its proximity to major roadways (Route 123/Gordon Boulevard and Interstate-95) and the Occoquan River. The majority of participants supported preservation of areas currently zoned for agricultural (A-1).

Groups felt this area’s scenic beauty, historical nature, and river views make it attractive to tourists and other





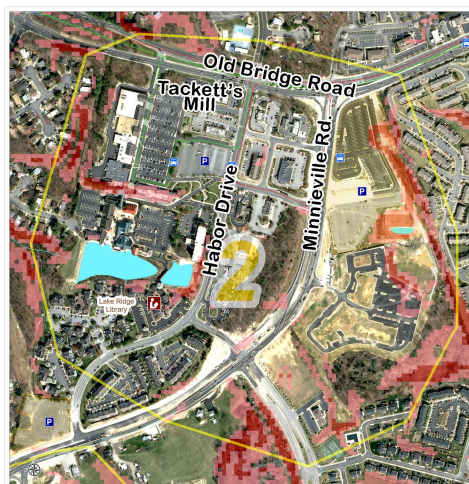
visitors, especially with the Town of Occoquan close by. Participants thought efforts to increase public access to the Occoquan River and the associated viewshed would help attract a greater number of visitors.

Should any new development be considered for this area, Charrette participants expressed a preference for mixed-use structures that offered multi-family residences housed over first-floor retail operations.

Some of the groups also recommended that consideration be given to any stormwater runoff that new development will create, as the area drains into the historic Town of Occoquan and the Occoquan River. They suggested low impact development (LID) techniques be incorporated into future development plans.

## Area 2: Tackett's Mill

Most of the breakout groups felt the area known as Tackett's Mill, originally planned as a community focal point, has not realized its full potential and should be a primary location for future redevelopment plans. Tackett's Mill is a 157,831-square-foot center that includes retail and office space surrounded by a dense residential population. It is located in close proximity to a commuter hub for both buses and "slug lines."



The lower section of the Tackett's Mill center was planned to be a restaurant destination. Centered on a beautiful lake complete with a covered bridge and walking paths, the design included space for a cinema or other entertainment as well as a variety of restaurants. The upper section of Tackett's Mill could accommodate non-chain retail along with shops that provide the day-to-day services needed by the surrounding community.

There was strong sentiment among participants that Tackett's Mill could be revitalized and return to its intended role as a community focal point and gathering place to provide unique shopping and social amenities, as well as a place to live and work. Participants expressed support for efforts to work with landowners to achieve revitalization goals.

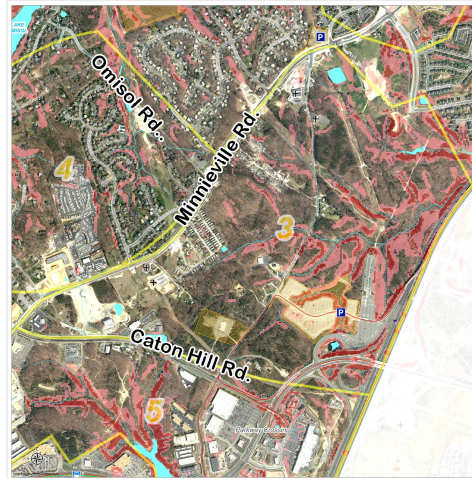
Underutilized parking lots located to the front of the center invite redevelopment focused on mixed-use structures. Participants also felt that public green open space is a vital component of successful centers and supported future efforts to secure additional urban parkland in the Tackett's Mill area as opportunities become available.

Participants suggested that the neighborhoods surrounding Tackett's Mill be better connected to this center, with more options for pedestrian and alternate modes of transportation. Development of a multi-modal network – trails, sidewalks, crosswalks and bikeways – would

provide residents living in the surrounding communities with pedestrian access as well as connect free-standing retail to the main center, and significantly increase the walkability of the entire area. In addition, extension of a multi-modal network at Tackett’s Mill connecting to nearby centers at the historic Town of Occoquan and Belmont Development could significantly enhance both the community and economic values associated with all three centers.

**Area 3: Caton Hill/Minnieville Road Corridor**

The Caton Hill/Minnieville Road Corridor area contains the largest commuter parking lot in the Occoquan District, which generates significant traffic congestion in the surrounding area during morning and evening rush hours.

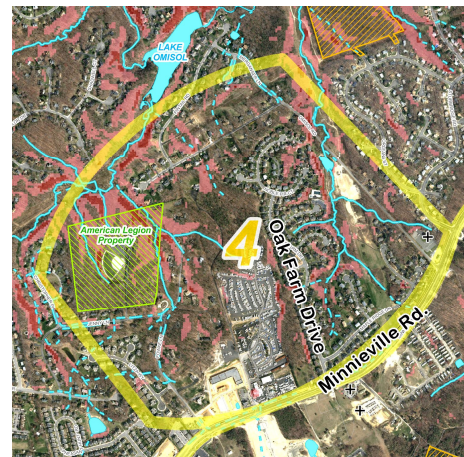


Although one group recommended very limited residential development, most participants were not in favor of any new residential densities in this area. One group felt that the area’s proximity to I-95 made it a good candidate for anticipated new office and retail growth; however the majority of participants felt that only very limited amounts of new office space were appropriate due to traffic congestion and the absence of planned public transportation for this area.

It is worth noting that these recommendations are accommodated by the recent approval of 367,900 square feet of commercial space and 200 multi-family units at Caton’s Crossing. Generally, most participants supported preservation of existing undeveloped areas and saw a need for a local park of some variety in this area.

**Area 4: Lake Omisol Area**

The Lake Omisol Area is largely developed with single-family homes on larger lots and includes the American Legion property, of which the Prince William County Park Authority currently leases a portion of this property for use as ball fields. This area also includes Lake Omisol, where residential development patterns currently preclude public access to the lake. A considerable network of green open space areas is privately owned and managed by several homeowner associations.



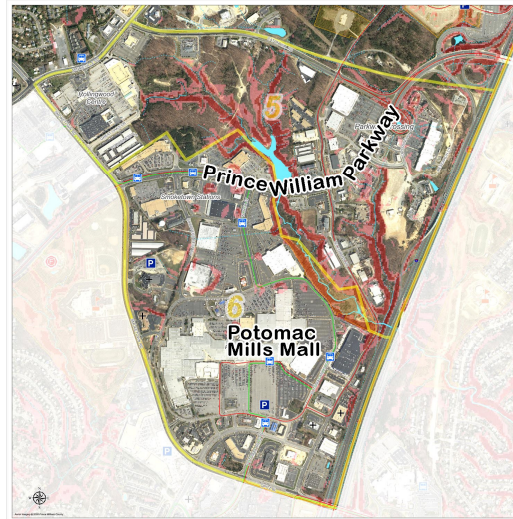
Participants agreed that this area was not suitable for additional residential or commercial development. Instead, participants felt this area was a candidate for future efforts to preserve and increase public access to green open space, including the development of trails to connect neighborhoods and provide passive recreation within walking distance of significant residential



populations. Additionally, some participants felt that a teen center might be well suited to this area, given the large number of families with children in the vicinity.

### Area 5: Extended Potomac Mills

This area is characterized by steep slopes and fragile soils with a network of intermittent streams that flow to Neabsco Creek, where significant flooding problems exist throughout the watershed. Portions of this area are currently intensely developed with a strong focus on commercial uses, including both office and retail. Undeveloped properties in this area are largely zoned for agricultural uses (A-1).



Participants saw this area as a candidate for new office or retail space but with a focus on revitalizing existing properties. The groups suggested that any revitalization or redevelopment efforts should prioritize mixed-use structures, particularly along the western and eastern portions of Telegraph Road. Additional hi-end retail was suggested for the I-95 area, but preferably mixed-use with first-floor retail and multi-family housing above. Generally, the majority of participants supported preservation of existing undeveloped areas and saw a need for a local park of some variety in this area.

### Area 6: Potomac Mills

Potomac Mills Mall, the second largest mall in the DC region, is the nexus of this thriving commercial area. With 1.6 million square feet of retail space, Potomac Mills Mall is the second largest taxpayer in the County behind Dominion Power, providing the District with both a strong tax base and enhancing opportunities to attract additional commercial uses.

Charrette participants expressed a desire to see Potomac Mills as a high-concentrated area for living and shopping with the ability to walk around. Although generally the area appears to be fairly built-out, participants saw opportunities for the redevelopment of under-utilized developed areas, focused on mixed-use structures that attract high-end retail and office uses.

Consistent with participants overall desire for increased walkability, future efforts should prioritize development of a multi-modal network connecting the focal point established by the Potomac Mills center to the surrounding area, allowing people the opportunity to move throughout the area without the use of a personal vehicle. Amenities that support non-motorized transportation options, including bike racks, should be established throughout the area.

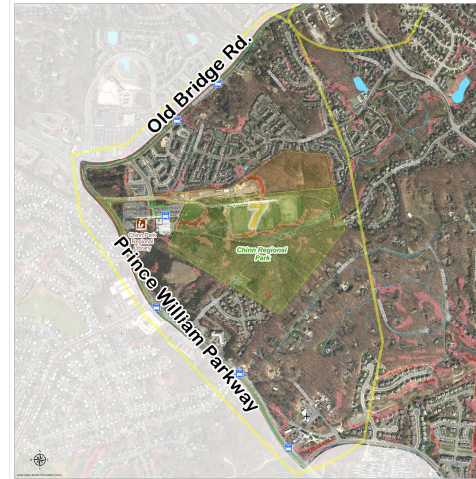
Although few green open spaces remain in this area, there are nonetheless significant opportunities to enhance the scenic appearance of the area through the addition of trees and shrubs to grass buffers. In addition, efforts to incorporate public art and create attractive

outdoor areas where people can gather would help achieve the type of bustling commercial hub envisioned by participants. Participants expressed support for efforts to work with businesses and landowners, including partnerships, to help incentivize improvements aimed at revitalizing this area.

### Area 7: Chinn

This area includes residential communities, a commercial center, a library, public fitness center and parkland that is suitable for both active and passive recreation uses.

Participants felt that it was important to prioritize open space preservation in this area, although opportunities for mixed-use structures were identified near the library and the Prince William Parkway. The Chinn Area was perceived as a candidate for future government or county buildings.



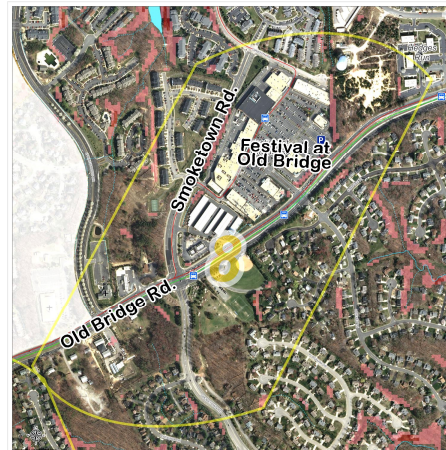
Participants noted the need for crossovers to increase pedestrian access to Chinn Park at the Prince William Parkway. Participants also viewed the Chinn area as a potential location for a teen center.

### Area 8: Old Bridge

This area includes residential communities, a commercial center and neighborhood-scale parkland amenities that are managed by homeowner associations.

Some participants suggested locating office space along the northern border of the Old Bridge Area, however most were not interested in significant new development in this area.

Participants did say that the Festival at Old Bridge, once considered a healthy shopping area, could benefit from some redevelopment, including mixed uses.



## Community Review

As a follow-up to the Community Visioning Exercise held on November 15, 2008, a second community meeting was held on January 31, 2009 at Lake Ridge Middle School in Woodbridge, Virginia. The meeting was designed to share current information, as well as collect further input from the community regarding how best to create a sustainable community plan for the Occoquan District.

The meeting was attended by approximately forty-five residents, many of whom had not attended the first visioning meeting held in November. This second meeting gave people an opportunity to hear the outcome of the survey and first visioning meeting exercises, as well as provide comments, ask additional questions, and express opinions.

The meeting opened with an overview of the project results to date. After delivering this overview, the EFC facilitated an open-forum discussion. Residents asked many questions and provided general opinions on expected growth, and voiced concerns about particular issues including storm water, trails and open space, tree preservation, redevelopment, and transportation.

The second half of the meeting consisted of a panel discussion with Supervisor May, Planning Commissioner Kim Hosen, EFC Associate Director Joanne Throwe, and Prince William County Transportation Engineers Monica Backmon and Steve Stevens. Details of the issues discussed are listed in the sub-sections below.

### General Comments

Generally participants agreed that the Occoquan District could expect more development regardless of whether it is desired. Most were in agreement that planning is crucial to keep development aligned with the community's vision. Participants felt anticipated development is being forced on them without regard for their interest in preserving open space and limiting growth. The mindset of participants was that they do not consider the Occoquan District to be an urban area, but rather that this role was being thrust upon the community.

Several questions were raised about the accuracy of growth projections for the Occoquan District. It was explained that the figures were estimates from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOCG) and are not considered an exact figure as the numbers were derivative based on several variables, including economic cycles.

It was strongly felt by many attending both public meeting events that if the community has prioritized protecting open space and preserving green areas, then consideration should be given to why the area **must** absorb 6,500 additional dwellings through 2030. Most voiced their opposition to this number as inappropriate for the Occoquan District. One participant restated it in terms of growing in quality instead of expanding in quantity and bringing in large amounts of new growth. Others were very vocal in stating that the expectations for future growth in the Occoquan District, regardless of the accuracy of the figures, was unwanted and should be put somewhere else in the county.

The participants were reminded that although no one is encouraging growth in the area, proper planning is needed in the case that the anticipated number given by MWCOCG are eventually realized. Ms. Hosen noted that Prince William County anticipates some level of growth, explaining that the County has been working with these numbers for quite some time and the current economic environment creates both new challenges and opportunities, such as the chance to obtain open space at reduced costs. It was noted that this may also be an ideal time

to work with developers to put together an overall plan that incorporates input from the community through a process that all stakeholders can share in and agree to.

### **Stormwater**

One of the greatest concerns expressed by participants on January 31<sup>st</sup> involved stormwater impacts to the Occoquan Reservoir. There was support for efforts to ensure that adequate environmental controls are in place during construction to prevent erosion and sedimentation. Residents recognized the need for stronger stormwater standards to mitigate pollution as well as the volume and velocity of stormwater flowing into the Reservoir. Residents noted that little if any stormwater management exists in many older areas, which were built before stormwater requirements were adopted and now require expensive retrofits to reduce negative impacts downstream. Participants supported development of a watershed management plan for the District.

### **Trails and Open Space**

Questions were raised about what participants referred to as the “sewer line trail” which exists on an easement along the Occoquan Reservoir and goes from the area known as McCoart and the Town of Occoquan. Parts of the trail through Springwoods and the Westridge areas have been improved and are listed by the Park Authority as being in good condition.

There was considerable interest in providing public access to the trail along the Occoquan Reservoir, which travels through areas currently managed by multiple landowners. Because portions of this trail are owned by multiple public and private entities, public access would require the approval of all landowners and agreement regarding long-term maintenance responsibilities. Residents noted that these discussions have been ongoing for more than five years with no resolution in site. Many felt that concerns about long-term maintenance were a barrier and suggested creating a “friends” organization to address these issues.

Participants also felt that power line right-of-ways offered an additional trail opportunity in the Occoquan District. In fact, in some areas, hikers, bikers, and all-terrain-vehicle users have established unofficial trails already. The green open space area between the privately-owned Lake Omisol and Colby Drive was identified as another area with potential for a trail system. Again, public access would require a partnership effort; although some of this area is publicly owned, most is owned by the Lake Ridge Homeowners Association.

Participants shared information on the current effort by the Prince William Board of County Supervisors to form a Trails Commission, the result of the last few years of citizen demand for trails and connectivity in the county. It is clear that collaborative partnerships and stakeholder coordination will be critical in establishing trail networks, inclusive of right-of-way and easement properties. This type of organization could be well-positioned to take on such a task.

Some participants asked specific questions about the type of open space that is desired and suggested expanding County efforts to create a more landscape-scale preservation ethic. Others were interested in the scale, scope, and ultimate purpose of the parcels to be protected.



It was noted by the EFC that since survey results and the Community Visioning Charrette indicated a desire to have small parks as well as large parks future discussions should incorporate an opportunity to define desired open space characteristics including size, location, and primary purpose.

The accessibility of privately owned properties, such as Lake Omisol or the American Legion, was again questioned. The Planning Commissioner felt that there were many opportunities to connect these trails as well as the hundreds of acres owned by home owners' associations and other entities. For example, the Amesbury Property could provide a public access point to a trail network, which would require a public-private partnership.

### **Tree Preservation**

Neighboring Fairfax County passed a tree preservation ordinance recently, prompting participants to ask panel members what tree preservation steps Prince William County intends to take. Ms. Hosen stated that the Occoquan District is very interested in preserving trees. The Board of Supervisors recently tasked the County Arborist with exploring opportunities to achieve these goals.

When asked whether a tree ordinance could be drafted and implemented, Ms. Hosen commented that localities were recently given the authority to adopt tree ordinances but none are presently being considered by the County. Fairfax County recently adopted a Tree Ordinance, which could provide a good model for Prince William County. Currently, tools to save trees are largely associated with rezoning and site planning through a review by both the arborist and Planning staff. Consideration is being given to enabling the Arborist to go out at the time of rezoning and identify trees worth preserving, which would better inform the Board of County Supervisors when rezoning decisions come before them.

### **Obstacles to Redevelopment**

Potomac Mills is considered by many to be developed to the point where establishing new parks or structures will require destroying existing development. With any future redevelopment plans of the Potomac Mills area, participants felt that consideration should be given to utilizing underused parking lots and other areas that could benefit from redevelopment

There was some discussion about the property known as the Walgreen's Development at the entrance to the Old Bridge Estates community on the western end of Old Bridge Road, and the potential impact that this meeting could have on previously approved developments. The Lake Ridge Occoquan Coles Civic Association (LOCCA) has been in discussion with the Old Bridge Estates HOA to work with the developers, however, this area was rezoned twenty years ago and any control of this development was limited. The suggestion was made to take an inventory of "stale zoning" that needs to be updated. Supervisor May agreed that an inventory was needed and acknowledged that there was minimal control of development over by-right parcels adding that he and others would continue to work with state legislators to get more tools in place. Ms. Hosen agreed that they had to comply with proffers and zoning.

## Traffic and Transportation

Traffic congestion, and associated vehicle and pedestrian safety on the roads, were a big concern at the community meeting held in January. A great deal of attention was directed in particular to Old Bridge Road and its continual increase in congestion and vehicular accidents. Since Old Bridge Road is a main thoroughfare from Manassas to I-95, questions were asked of the panel about what could be done to resolve these issues. The panel informed participants that Old Bridge Road cannot be widened due to topography but that better traffic signalization and coordination is expected in the near future. Questions were raised, however, as to whether signalization alone would be enough to limit accidents and fatalities. Panel members recognized the constraints and noted that other options beyond signalization were being explored as well. Supervisor May stated that there was a plan in place to correct the banking of Old Bridge Road and construction was expected to begin in the spring. In addition, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has been asked to put in an additional guard rail with the expectation that they will help to reduce the number of fatalities.

Comment was made by a panel member regarding pavement markings on roads in the area. Currently, the County uses thermo-plastic paint which seems to wear down quickly. An alternative option would be raised markers – small reflective markers that are easy to see and provide great benefit to drivers, especially at night and during inclement weather. Unfortunately, it was noted that these markers are expensive to purchase and maintain but on heavily traveled roads such as Route 123, these markers could be very useful. Mr. Stevens said that participants should list areas of specific concerns so that it could be brought to the attention of VDOT.

Many of the comments received by the County Traffic Engineers related to signal timing, but it was acknowledged that Old Bridge Road is a very difficult road to fix. The biggest problem stems from use that exceeds the capacity of the road, including congestion generated by commuters coming from Manassas and the Coles area, who use Old Bridge Road as a cut-through. The extensive network of traffic signals on Prince William Parkway discourages commuters Old Bridge Road is a favorite alternative. It was suggested by one panel member that one way to control additional congestion would be to better scrutinize development plans along the corridor to ensure the problem is not exacerbated. Another solution may be to improve Prince William Parkway from Hoadley Road to Old Bridge Road. This could become a possibility with federal stimulus money dedicated to infrastructure. Another solution suggested by Supervisor May was to do a better job of bringing businesses here with the reasoning that by coordinating additional business locations in the Occoquan District, people will commute less, thereby reducing congestion.

In discussing alternative forms of transportation, a panel member cited that ways were being explored to draw commuters into alternative modes of transport such as expanding the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and the Prince William Transportation Connector (PWTC). In addition to the concept of developing a BRT, other modes of transportation are being explored but studies remain to be conducted on the feasibility of these alternatives. Additional comments received after the January event included consideration of parallel walking paths and sidewalks to

improve pedestrian connection between local communities and business and retail centers; installation of well-marked crossing opportunities for pedestrians with more push-button pedestrian signals in various locations; and creation of a pedestrian bridge near the Antietam Road intersection.

# Recommendations

Based on the survey results and the information collected at the Community Visioning Charrette, the EFC project team sees real opportunities for the Occoquan District to take the first steps toward meeting short-term goals, as well as planning to meet longer-term goals. The following recommendations are designed to inform decision-making in the Occoquan District with the objective of creating a strong, vibrant community in which to live, work, and retire through 2030.

## ***Development and Growth Recommendation***

### **Undeveloped does not mean unvalued.**

Although undeveloped areas are often considered as ideal locations for new growth, one of the recurring themes that emerged, particularly during the mapping exercise, was that residents value these open spaces and would prefer to keep these areas intact and protected from future development.

### **Consider a focus on redevelopment.**

An overwhelming majority of residents found the Occoquan District to be a good place to live. However, Charrette participants found no shortage of things they believed were not working in the District. Participants identified several areas where redevelopment opportunities could accommodate anticipated new development while addressing community concerns and preserving open space.

### **Incorporate smart growth principles into redevelopment plans.**

Planning for the redevelopment of areas such as Potomac Mills or Tackett's Mill, should incorporate smart growth principles to meet expressed community desires as well as accommodate expected growth. Survey respondents and Charrette participants both indicated a need for improved connectivity between residential development, retail, open space, and other resources, as well as a desire to make use of alternative modes of transportation more available and preserve existing open spaces. Using a smart growth approach to redevelopment activities would ensure that features such as mixed-use structures that condense growth and multi-modal pathways that encourage alternative modes of transportation, improve community connectivity, and alleviate traffic congestion are incorporated into community designs. Trees, parks, and other types of open space provide a host of community benefits including climate control, stormwater management, socio-economic development, recreation opportunities, and more. These are important smart growth features that will be valuable considerations in redevelopment planning.



## ***Natural Resource and Environment Recommendations***

### **Protect existing open spaces.**

Survey respondents and Charrette participants all expressed a strong desire to protect and enhance the existing natural resources and open space areas that make the Occoquan District an ideal place to live. There are several existing open space areas which are highly valued by the community and should remain protected and undeveloped. These areas could serve as the initial core of a green infrastructure network for the Occoquan District that could be expanded on as future planning decisions are made.

### **Improve the accessibility of existing open spaces and public use areas.**

The sentiment that existing open spaces were appreciated, but not always accessible was heard repeatedly from community members. These areas would benefit from improved public access points and an enhanced and expanded trail system that connects natural areas with one another, as well as with the residential and commercial parts of the Occoquan District. In addition, a low-impact recreational trail along the water's edge could help provide natural resource and source water protection, which are highly valued by the community.

### **Preserve and enhance tree canopy.**

Residents of the Occoquan District value trees, as indicated in the survey and at the Charrette. To the greatest extent possible, all areas currently designated for tree preservation should remain untouched and whenever possible, new trees should be added. In addition, putting stronger natural resource conservation requirements in place for developers, including tree ordinances that protect smaller tree stands and single specimens from development, may be necessary to address the threats posed by the projected growth. According to participants trees are a crucial consideration in any redevelopment plans.

## ***Transportation Recommendations***

### **Improve opportunities for alternatives to vehicular transportation.**

The walkability of the Occoquan District is not meeting the needs expressed by the community. Pedestrians find very few areas in the District where they can walk or hike, children are largely unable to walk to school, and cyclists are unable to use their bikes for recreation or transportation in much of the District.

Participants also found that the local bus service, Omni-Link, is not meeting the needs of the community. In addition to the limited route offerings, participants felt that inadequate handicapped access makes it difficult for senior citizens to use the system. Participants felt that planning for expanded bus services, including a reevaluation of current bus routes and schedules, would better serve the local residents and ultimately reduce the number of cars on the road.

To the greatest extent possible, the Occoquan District should take steps towards developing a mobility plan for the area that considers opportunities to improve bus for walking, biking or recreation. Due to the funding that is needed to implement the goals, it is recommended that

improvements be added in stages over a period of years with an overall plan that focuses on connectivity to existing trails and residential and retail development.

## Conclusion

To a certain extent, growth is inevitable, and the Prince William County Comprehensive Plan suggests that the Occoquan District is no exception. However, taking proactive steps to address anticipated growth and incorporating the voice of residents in the planning process can address community concerns, head off potential problems, and create a unified vision for the future. This type of collaborative effort will ensure that the Occoquan District is a place where community members will continue to live, work, play and retire happily for decades to come.

# The EFC Project Team

## ***Joanne Throwe, Associate Director***

Joanne Throwe, Associate Director of the Environmental Finance Center. Prior to this, Ms. Throwe was the Agriculture Program Leader for EFC. She recently completed an 18-month assignment working with USDA/CSREES as shared faculty to assist in the coordination of special agriculture projects. Ms. Throwe works with communities in the Mid-Atlantic region implementing innovative financing solutions for environmental protection. Her work experience includes extensive knowledge about agriculture, green initiatives, biofuels, ecosystem services and solid waste management. Prior to joining the EFC, Ms. Throwe spent several years as a Development Resource Specialist at USDA's Foreign Agriculture Service and two years as an Agriculture Extension Agent for Peace Corps in the South Pacific. She holds a M.A. in Public Policy and Private Enterprise from the University of Maryland. She also received intensive agriculture training from the Hawaii Loa College and the East West Center in Hawaii.

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## ***Kristen Mui, Research Assistant***

Kristen Mui is a senior undergraduate student at the University of Maryland, College Park, earning a degree in Urban Studies and Planning. Ms. Mui joined the EFC in the fall of 2007 and conducts a number of research and administrative activities for various EFC projects. Last summer she interned with the Prince George's County Planning Department under the Countywide Environmental Planning Section and researched progressive environmental planning policy and practices to potentially be applied in Prince George's County. Ms. Mui will be spending her last semester, spring 2009, in Copenhagen, Denmark studying urban and environmental planning and policy. [kmui@umd.edu](mailto:kmui@umd.edu)

# Appendices

**Appendix A: Zoning Map**

**Appendix B: Transportation Improvements Map**

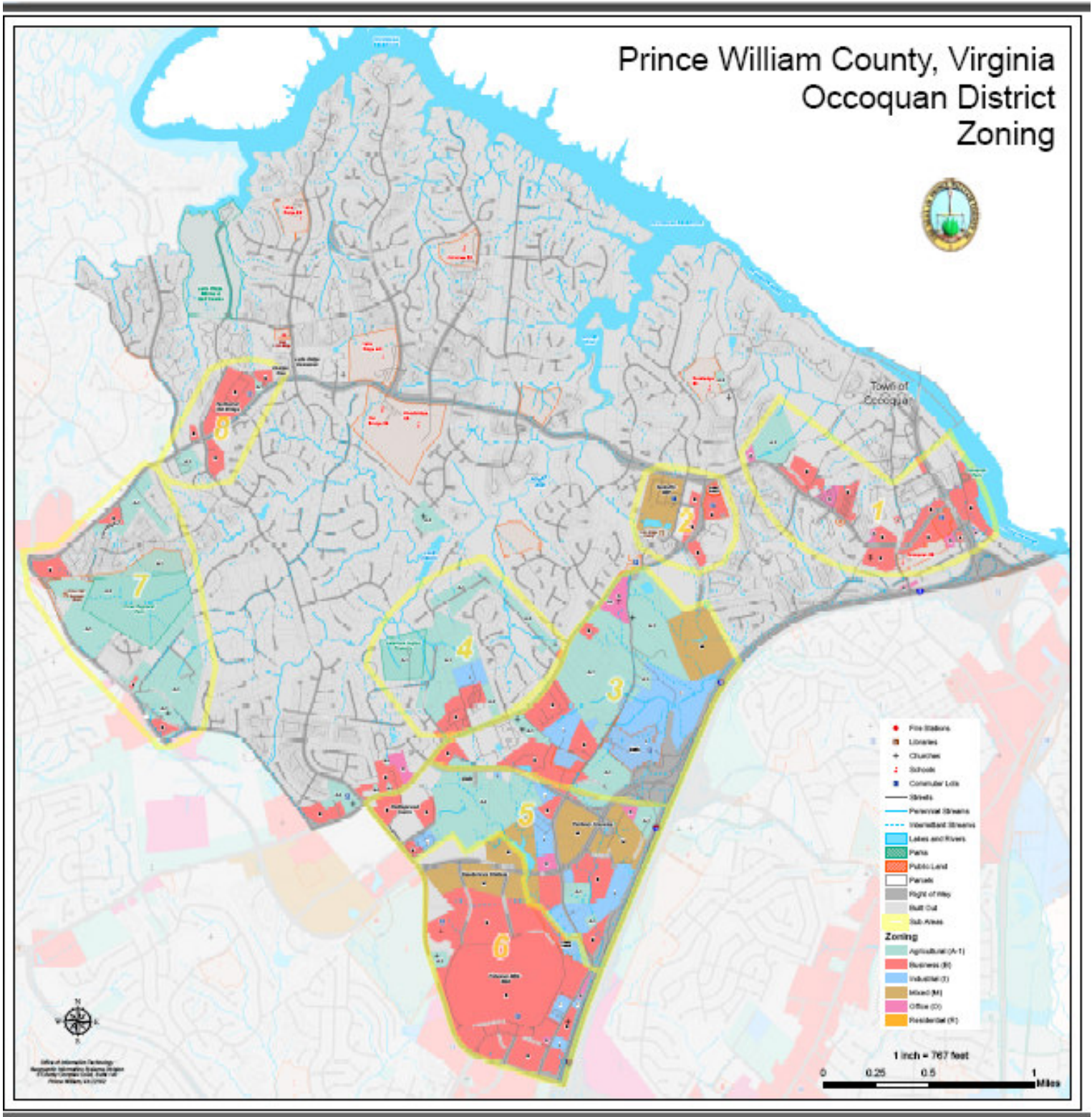
**Appendix C: Occoquan District Ariel Base Map**

**Appendix D: Citizen Input Composite Map**

**Appendix E: List of November Charrette Attendees**

**Appendix F: List of January Charrette Follow-Up Attendees**

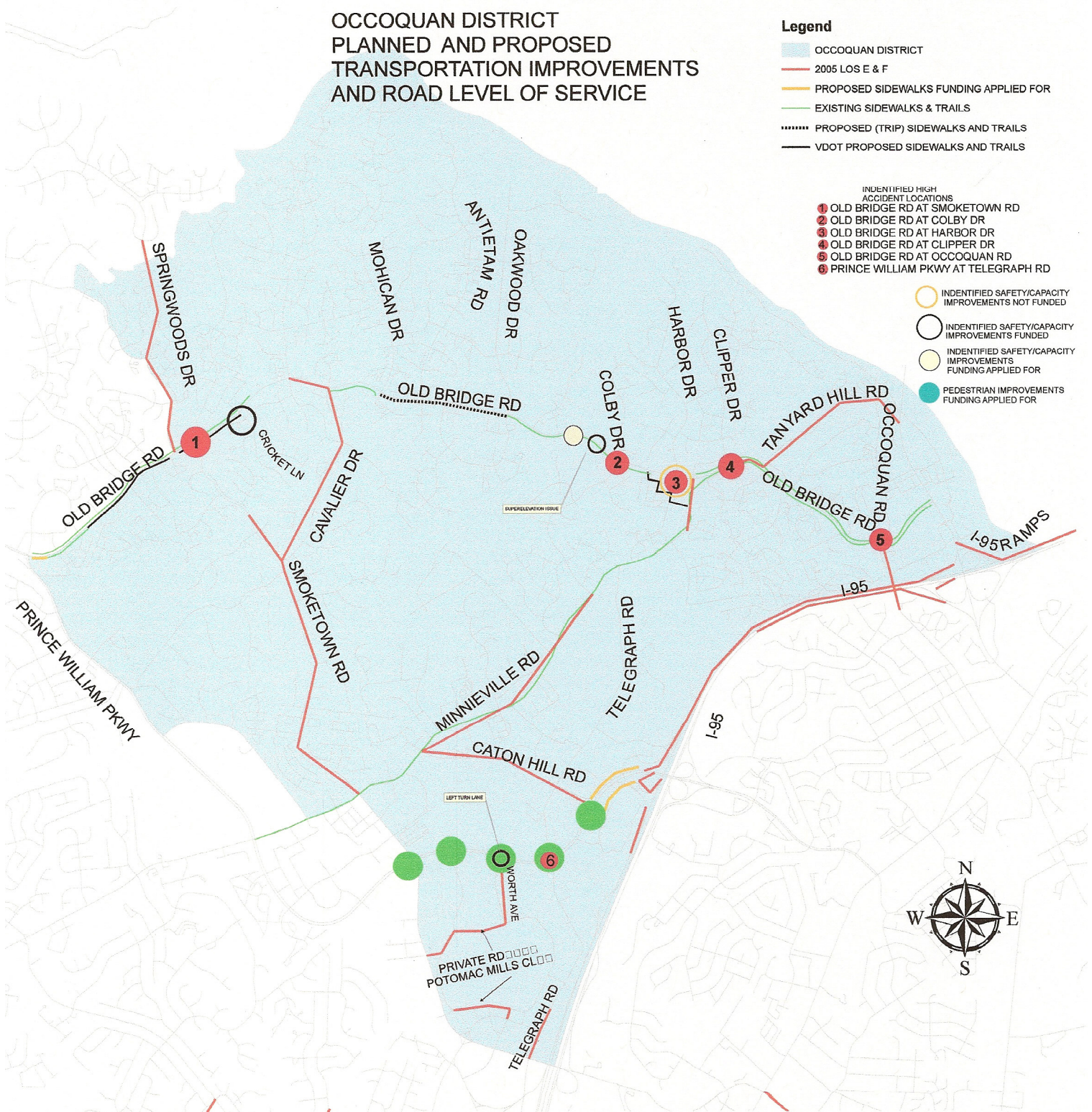
## Appendix A: Zoning Map





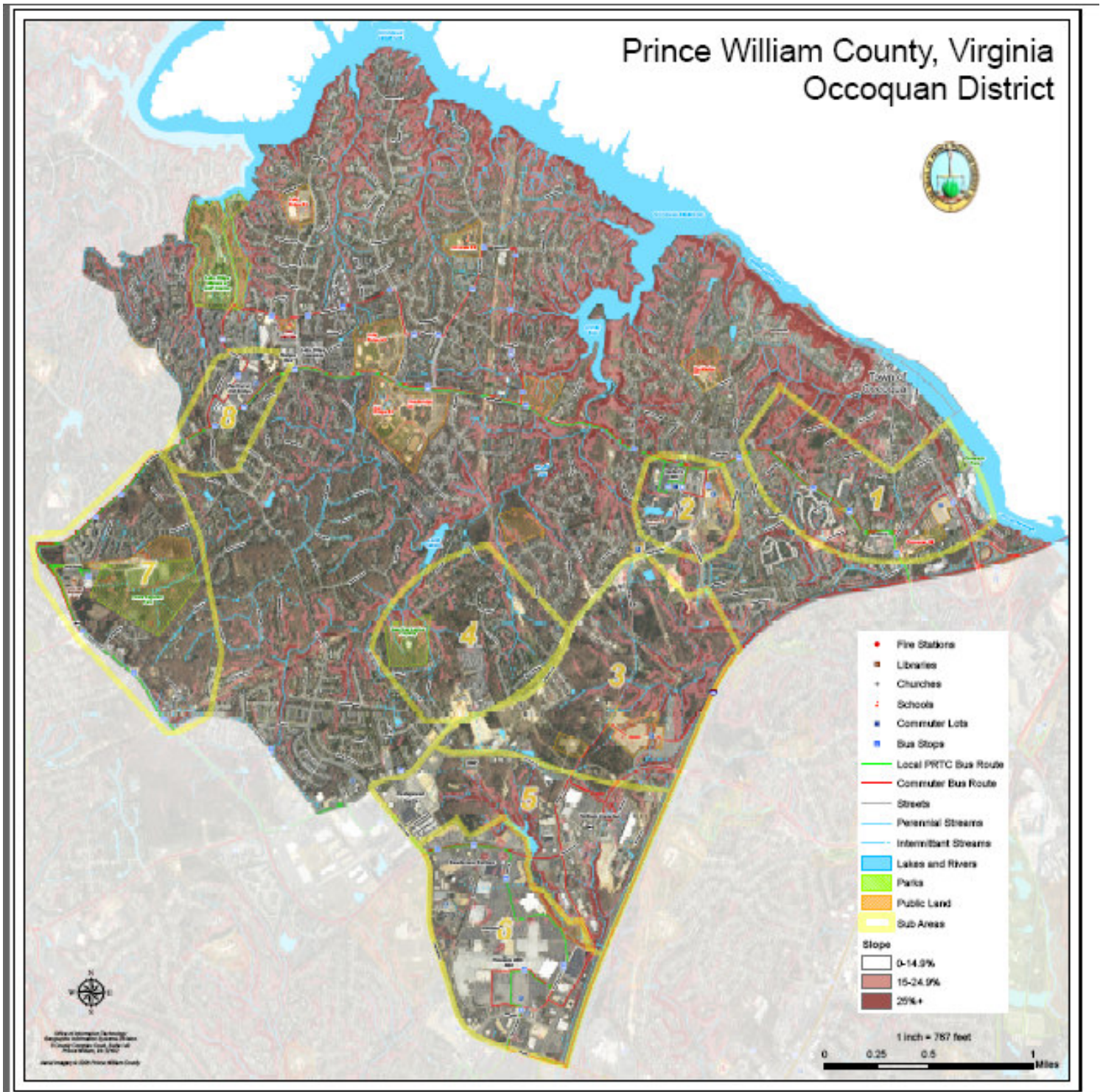
## Appendix B: Transportation Improvements Map

### OCCOQUAN DISTRICT PLANNED AND PROPOSED TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS AND ROAD LEVEL OF SERVICE



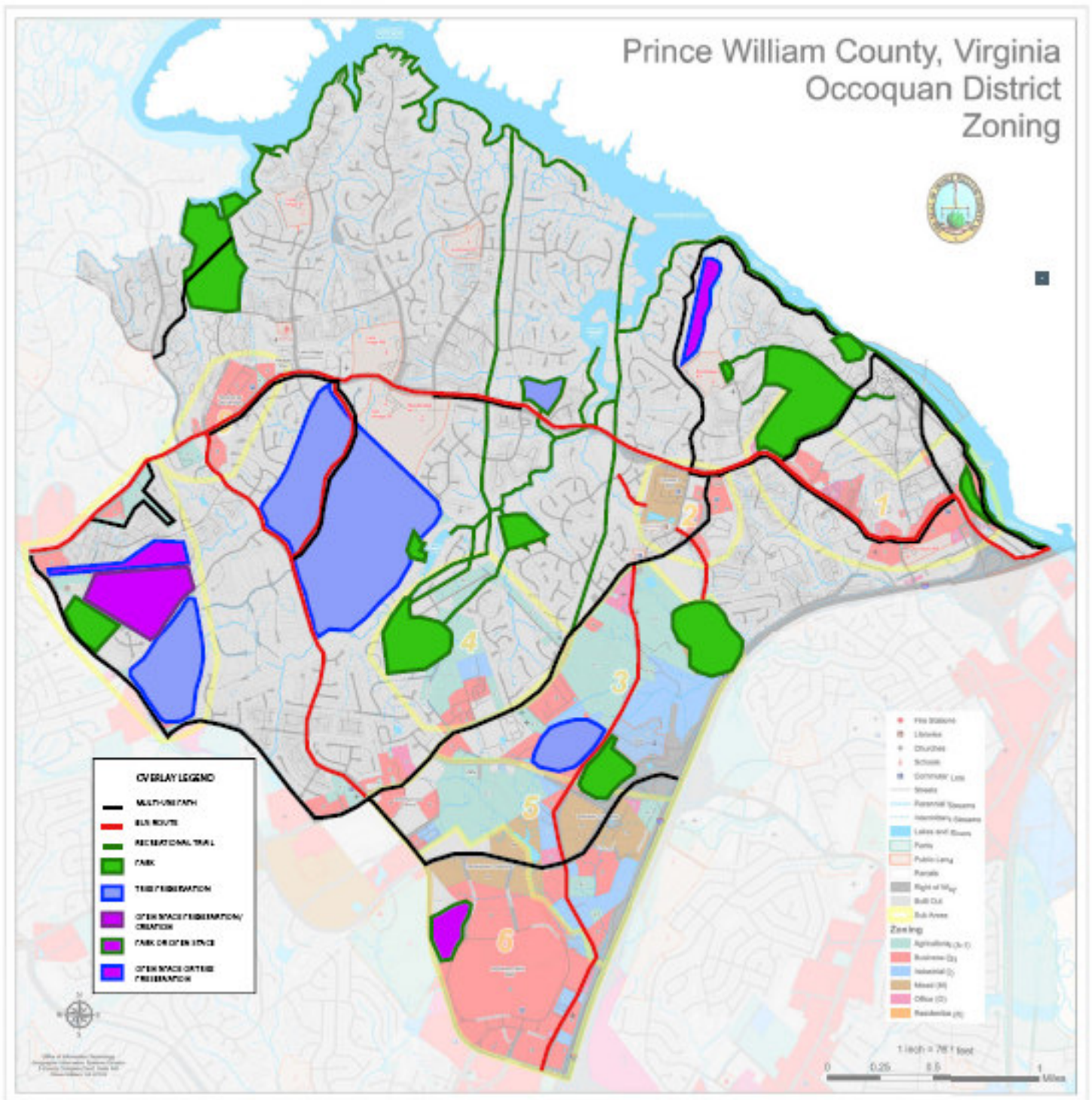


## Appendix C: Occoquan District Ariel Base Map





## Appendix D: Citizen Input Composite Map



## Appendix E: List of November Charrette Attendees

### Occoquan District Community Visioning Meeting Saturday, November 15, 2008

<b>Name</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Community</b>
D. Bolton	Woodbridge	B. C. Keener	Woodbridge
J. Houser	Lorton	R. D. Yoho	Woodbridge
L. Feld-Mushaw	Woodbridge	C. Blouin	Woodbridge
D. Doyle	Woodbridge	S. Patrick	Woodbridge
M. Wilson	Woodbridge	F. Wilson	Woodbridge
R. Miller	Woodbridge	R. Horton	Woodbridge
T. Andrews	Woodbridge	B. Bliss	Woodbridge
P. Reynolds	Woodbridge	E. Arnold	Woodbridge
A. Reynolds	Woodbridge	L. Long	Woodbridge
C. Furr	Woodbridge	M. Schultz	Woodbridge
D. W. Boyd	Woodbridge	M. Scott	Woodbridge
J. Fields	Woodbridge	N. Stegon	Woodbridge
J. C. Fields	Woodbridge		
E. Sheridan	Woodbridge		
D. Blouin	Woodbridge		
J. Kooyoomjian	Woodbridge		
S. Griffin	Woodbridge		
C. Hathorne	Woodbridge		
C. Barfield	Woodbridge		
B. Dean	Occoquan		
C. Chumley	Potomac News		
A. Bennett	Woodbridge		
N. Nelson	Woodbridge		
M. Reinhart	Woodbridge		
G. Navh-Korli	Woodbridge		
D. Gott	Potomac Mills		
J. Brighton	Woodbridge		
D. Swavely	Woodbridge		
J. Hill	Woodbridge		
L. Hill	Woodbridge		
B. Paciejewski	Woodbridge		
J. Cox	Woodbridge		
B. Storck	Woodbridge		
B. Wilson	Woodbridge		
P. Schnessler	Woodbridge		

<b>Staff in Attendance</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Office</b>
M. May	BOCS
A. Betts	BOCS
E. Cronin	BOCS
K. Hosen	Planning Commission
J. Throwe	EFC
K. Mui	EFC

<b>Charrette Facilitators</b>	
J. Cotting	EFC
J. Throwe	EFC
M. Hughes	EFC
K. Mui	EFC
J. Hosen	

## **Appendix F: List of January Charrette Follow-Up Attendees**

### **Occoquan District Community Visioning Meeting Saturday, January 31, 2009**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Community</b>		
B. Storck	Woodbridge	P. Nichols	Woodbridge
J. Cox	Woodbridge	A. Streng	Potomac News
E. Cronin	Woodbridge	S. Mushaw	Woodbridge
W. Foscue	Woodbridge	D. Blouin	Woodbridge
M. Wilson	Woodbridge	D. Bolton	Woodbridge
E. Arnold	Woodbridge		
J. Ferrall	Woodbridge		
G. Burda	Woodbridge		
R. Buckley	Woodbridge		
M. Quinlan	Woodbridge		
S. Quinlan	Woodbridge		
S. School	Woodbridge		
R. Utz	Manassas		
J.C. Fields	Woodbridge		
J.E. Fields	Woodbridge		
D. Doyle	Woodbridge		
P. O'Toole	Woodbridge		
H. Wiggins	Woodbridge		
C. Patterson	Dumfries		
S. Couteau	Woodbridge		
R. Godfrey	Woodbridge		
E. Sheridan	Woodbridge		
M. Schultz	Woodbridge		
T. Kochis	Woodbridge		
R. Miller	Woodbridge		
J. Brighton	Woodbridge		
M. Reinhart	Woodbridge		
L. Feld-Mushaw	Woodbridge		
J. Kooyoomjian	Woodbridge		
R. Anderson	Woodbridge		
C. Blouin	Woodbridge		
D. Swavely	Woodbridge		
A. Bombay	Woodbridge		
B. Bombay	Woodbridge		

<b>Staff in Attendance</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Office</b>
M. May	BOCS
A. Betts	BOCS
E. Cronin	BOCS
K. Hosen	Planning Commission
M. Backmon	PWC Transportation
S. Stevens	PWC Transportation
J. Throwe	EFC