



Page County Zoning & Subdivision Ordinance Update Stakeholder Interview Summary

September 2, 2020

This document summarizes the suggestions, concerns, and comments from four stakeholder groups that were interviewed as part of the Page County Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance update process. These groups included farmers, tourism professionals, realtors, bankers, attorneys, builders/contractors, surveyors, and County GIS, Economic Development, and Stormwater/Floodplain Management staff. A total of 21 individuals were contacted as part of the effort, and 14 individuals participated in the interviews. Each stakeholder group discussed the existing regulations and opportunities for improvement. The feedback has been summarized by stakeholder group, as outlined below:

Farmers

- Protect the agriculture industry which is the top industry in the County with twice the revenue as tourism (confirmed by economic development); Page County is #3 in the State for agriculture.
- Protect agricultural and forested lands while allowing for development appropriate in scale (i.e. medium to small scale industrial use) that would be sensitive to natural environment (suited for terrain, floodplains, karst).
- Expand middle sized farms; important to maintain markets; possible niche markets to serve northern VA/DC.
- Recognize and embrace natural protections/limitations of the area (mountains along both sides and river with valley between); important to maintain views of valley.
- Abandon industrial use plan in the (currently undeveloped) Industrial District between Luray and Stanley, all felt the location was inappropriate.
- Open to industrial uses in appropriate places (edge of towns with utilities and services) that use the natural resources of County such as wood/forestry products industry.
- Keep residential and commercial development adjacent to towns as opposed to locating on prime farm and forestry lands; some residential appropriate in mountains and wooded areas, but concern with provision of emergency services to homes on mountain; preserve timber.
- Some issues with the 1.75-acre lot size minimum in agricultural areas but no major issues; consideration for larger lots in A to allow greater setbacks from farm operations, but also concerned larger lot residential would consume ag and forestry lands.
- The impacts of storm water runoff pollution on agriculture was a concern.

- Understand certain buffers and setbacks for ag uses, but need to look at possibility of placing greater setbacks for wells and dwellings for new development so existing farm activity (involving crops/manure spreading) does not have to be further curtailed; important to reduce conflicts between agricultural land use and residential
- While supportive of tourism, there were concerns about the impacts of tourists on the ecology – when those floating the river make “rest stops” and leave behind trash and debris; some land owners have to fence property to prevent trespassing.
- Support agritourism as part of the tourism economy.
- Oppose commercial and industrial zoning on Route 340.

Tourism Professionals

- Agriculture and tourism are the biggest revenue producers. Development decisions need to be “sensitive to” the impact on those industries and recognize the “trickle down” and “trickle up” benefits those industries bring to the local economy (1.5 million visitors to Shenandoah National Park and 500,000 visitors to Luray Caverns annually); Tourism is a clean industry.
- Preserve natural resources as once denuded they will be forever lost/ruined; natural beauty of area must be preserved; if it can be seen from Skyline Drive, don’t do it.
- Consider viewshed zones (protection of upper and lower viewsheds); increased setbacks/buffers along Routes 340 and 211; along entrance corridors; important to preserve local economy.
- Important to preserve topography, landscape, national park, and farming.
- Support tourism service economy (commercial growth such as restaurants, wineries), but preservation of viewshed and natural resources is more important. Want modern conveniences that match area character and low impact development.
- Consider design standards that could make larger businesses and chain retail and restaurants fit the character of the area making them more appropriate (less impact) such as height, color, landscaping, fencing and buffer standards, and historic/valley-style architecture for commercial development. Avoid Page County being developed as “Anywhere, USA”; Federal style buildings with quality textured materials, agricultural looking structures, Courthouse on Main Street in Luray, and valley buildings at museum are good examples.
- No speculative commercial zoning – if someone wants to start a business they should be “invested” enough to go through the special use permit or rezoning processes.
- Consider cap on light industrial zoning and separate uses to reduce land use impact; existing brownfield sites would be appropriate for industrial use; separate industrial use from tourism and residential uses.
- Consider lighting regulation to protect dark skies.

- Oppose larger scale solar use over 150 acres; must ensure solar does not degrade viewshed; use changes the environment/wildlife; major setbacks should be required.
- Signage restrictions (size and offsite) are too stringent, but stay away from brightly colored, electronic, neon, or moving signs.
- Need more government initiated directional signage for parks, recreation, points of interest, etc.; use a consistent County “brand” and colors; government signage should be exempt from sign regulations in zoning ordinance.
- Focus residential development around towns
- Need better high-speed internet access; possible grants/funding should be pursued
- Follow the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan; it is a good, forward-thinking document that looks out for the interest of the community.
- Communication tower fees are excessive and process not user friendly.
- Don’t understand the point of the 5-year wait for land subdivisions. With one dwelling permitted per parcel, restriction hinders cabin rental business; Page County is the “Cabin Capital of the US”.
- Stormwater regulations (enforced by county) are too restrictive for rural area development.
- Would like to see more online meeting opportunities

Bankers, Attorneys, Real Estate Agents/Investors

- County Zoning needs to be more streamlined/business friendly (such as with wedding venues and ag-tourism uses).
- Regulations need to be broad and less regulation is better; Oppose more government.
- Concern design standards will restrict commercial development; already an issue with attracting commercial development to county; maybe consider design standards along gateway corridors.
- Establish commercial zone instead of every commercial use having SUP; zone for the place not the specific person; Commercial zones should be considered along main roads at corners.
- Restriction of residential development to the minimum 1.75-acre lot size is too high and the 5-year subdivision rule strictly limits/slow new residential growth and cabin development; Allow smaller lots in other areas and larger lots to protect farmland areas.
- Need more moderate to low income housing (under \$200,000).
- Need housing variety to include possible townhomes, rental possibilities, higher density.
- Need more full-time rental homes – as opposed to vacation rentals.
- Concern after SUPs granted ensuring long-term compliance with conditions is an issue; believe some camping areas approved along rivers may be increasing camping sites above approval.

- Support agricultural uses in residential areas (small scale farming including keeping livestock and gardening); rules should be clear to apply to everyone; minimum lot size to keep animals may be necessary.
- Protect natural resources; river is over-used; tourists leave trash; potential contamination of river.
- Enforcement of code is only complaint based; issue with junk storage being allowed if covered by tarp; with weather, tarp looks just as bad as junk pile.
- Residential subdivision requirement to construct roads to VDOT standards impedes residential subdivision development; ordinance encourages road stripping of lots along existing state roads; consider private roads for residential subdivision development; would need to consider ability of homeowners to maintain roads; have had issues with owners not paying association dues.
- Consider residential zoning in areas near towns; include recreational requirements for subdivisions; larger lots in other areas.
- Suggest no residential in Woodland Conservation areas.
- Support short-term rentals but need standards; impacts adjacent to existing owner-occupied dwellings.
- Need more economic activity.

Surveyors, Contractors, and Staff

- Minimum subdivision standards (including the issue of 5 year wait between subdivisions) is cumbersome for slowly growing area; Need clarity in some standards relative to setbacks from rights-of-way, corner lots or irregular shaped lots and measuring minimum lot width requirements.
- Need to remove split zoning on properties; difficult to determine exact zoning boundary on split zoned properties.
- Widths of access roads for lots should be discussed; If need to run utilities to lots, access should be 50 feet wide; From construction standpoint, access roads should be a minimum of 30 feet wide.
- Lots recorded prior to the adoption of the 1.75 minimum lot area were allowed to be 0.75 acres and were allowed smaller building setbacks.
- There is a delay in receiving response for zoning permits; don't mind paying fee, even higher fee if needed, to get reviews completed quicker. Delay in most instances from state agencies required to review permits.
- Floodplain ordinance needs to be updated to meet state template and would like to consider any revisions friendly to agriculture.
- Infrastructure not in place to allow for commercial development; proffered condition requirements are often more than a development can handle so development does not happen.

- As an example, the owner of a 92-acre site, zoned commercial with utilities to site, could not sell the property for commercial use.
- County has an identity problem; wants development but standards too punitive to allow growth.
- Need more affordable housing options.
- Need to look at standards for mobile home park development; currently two or more mobile homes is considered a mobile home park and (road) requirements are cost prohibitive for MHP development.