

1 Introduction

The City of Fairfax (“the City”) is unique in boasting the benefits of a closely knit community that is hard to find in the Metropolitan Washington region and the access and proximity to large-city amenities and activities. Residents enjoy neighborhoods with distinct character, an active arts scene, high-quality educational institutions for all ages, easy access to natural amenities, and exceptional City services and facilities. Employees and business owners appreciate its central location within Northern Virginia; ease of access and adjacency to major thoroughfares, and its proximity to

major regional employers in the health, education, government, and legal sectors.

Nonetheless, the City is not immune to the internal and external elements that place considerable pressure on its identity and future. Some of the City’s commercial and retail properties are aging and growing less competitive with nearby jurisdictions, raising questions about future development and tax burdens on City residents. Region-wide issues of affordable housing, aging and stressed utility infrastructure, traffic congestion, and environmental concerns similarly impact the City and those who live and work here.

As the City’s official policy guide for future development-related decisions, the 2035 Comprehensive Plan (“the Comprehensive Plan”) provides direction to enhance the City’s function, appearance, and livability based on its current conditions. It seeks to provide the opportunity to examine various forces affecting the City – such as redevelopment opportunities, economic competitiveness, and an increasingly strained transportation network – and propose innovative solutions that benefit City residents, workers, and visitors alike. It builds upon and commits to recent and ongoing efforts to address systemic inequity, such as Connecting Fairfax City for All, the Homelessness Task Force, and the Mayor’s Advisory Committee on Housing. As changes occur in and around the City, the Comprehensive Plan provides a framework for responding to and thriving as a result of these changes. Those who contributed to the Comprehensive Plan hope that readers find it a thoughtfully-crafted document that lends itself to enhancing quality of life and making the City a great place for everyone.



Background

The City was established as the Town of Providence in 1805 following the construction of the Fairfax County Courthouse at the rural crossroads of Little River Turnpike and Ox Road. The Town became a hub of commerce within a predominantly agricultural area removed from the growing City of Washington. In 1874, the Town adopted the name Fairfax.

The Town emerged as a more significant regional crossroads when US 50 and US 29 were created in 1926 as part of the original U.S. Highway System. These roadways supported the City's economic growth as businesses expanded around the needs of travelers, and the industries serving the surrounding dairy farms. Federal housing programs following World War II catalyzed suburban development in the City, attracting veterans and their families and spurring rapid population growth. While homeownership opportunities were not equally available to all races and incomes as most of the single-family homes in the City were developed prior to the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the City has recently begun efforts to help address this inequity.

The Town was incorporated as the City of Fairfax in 1961. Further economic growth was

fueled by the establishment of George Mason University along the City's southern border in 1964, the opening of Interstate 66 along the northern border in 1982, the extension of the Metrorail Orange Line from Washington to the nearby Vienna/Fairfax-GMU station in 1986, and continued overall growth of the region.

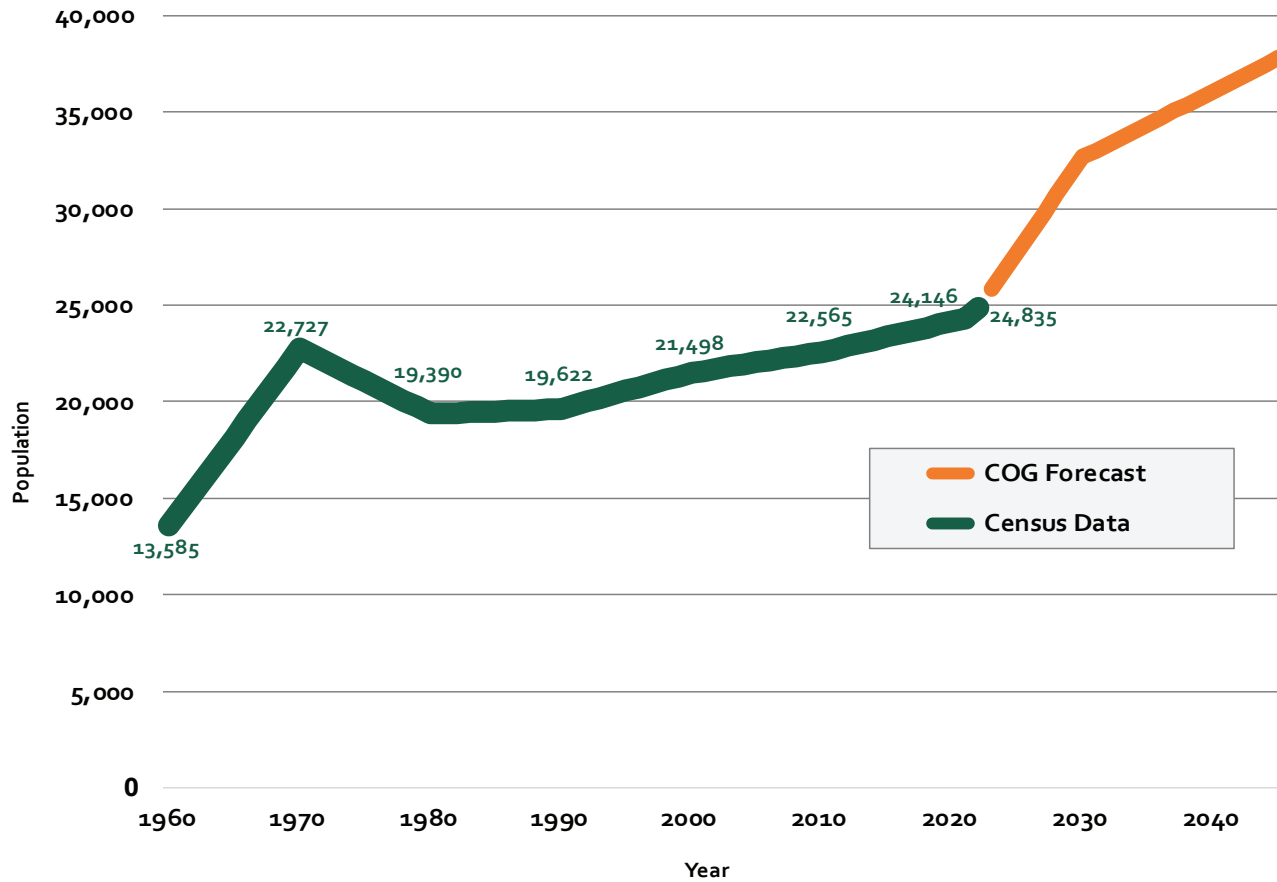
Today, the City is an independent jurisdiction of just over six square miles and a current population of around 25,000, located in the

heart of Northern Virginia. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) forecasts a population increase of 3,400 people in the City by 2035, as shown in Figure 1, as diverse housing opportunities continue to emerge. The City strives to maintain its unique charm while being accessible and inclusive for all and guiding the growth and development consistent with projections for the metropolitan area.



Main Street Fairfax, 1905 - Winter view of Main Street with the Ratcliffe-Allison House on the right next to Town Hall, built only five years earlier, at the intersection with Mechanic Street (now University Drive).

FIGURE 1 POPULATION HISTORY AND FORECASTS

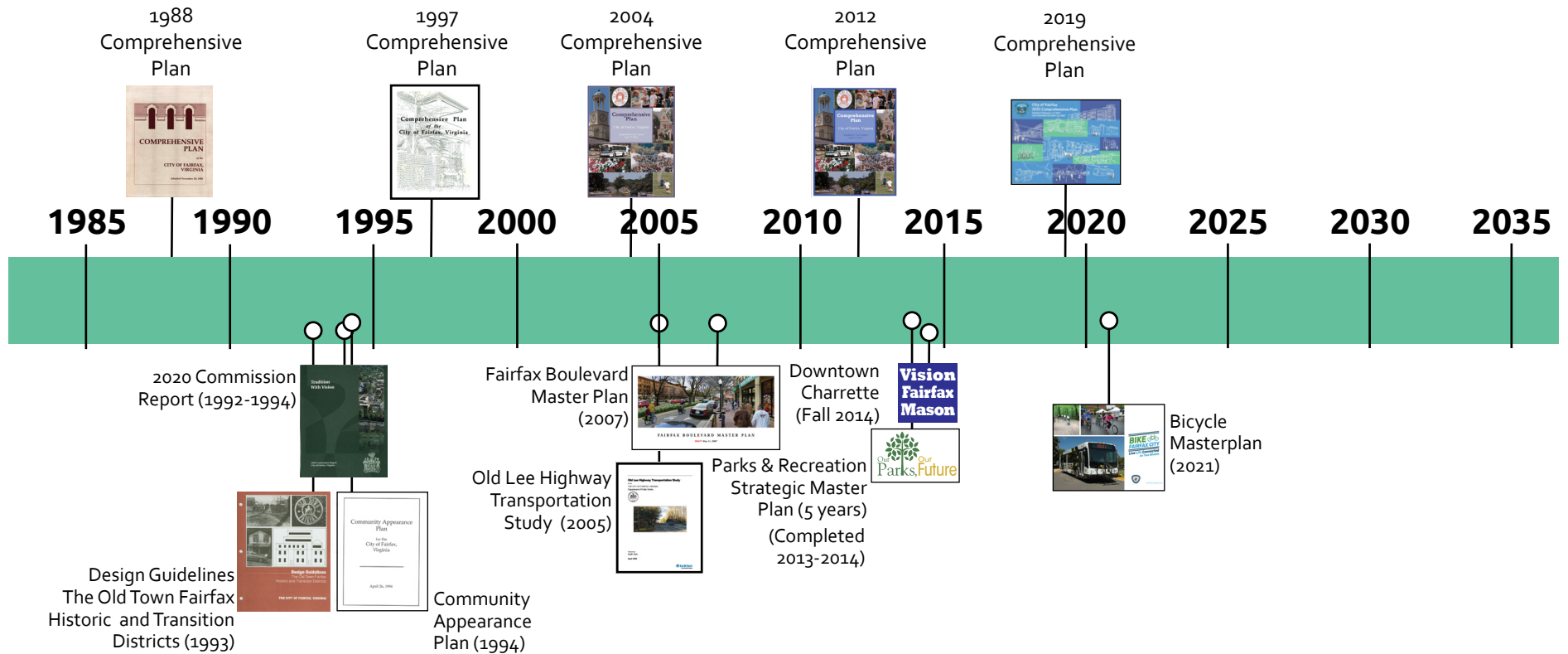


Source: US Census and MWCOG Round 10 Cooperative Forecasting: Population and Household Forecasts

City of Fairfax
2024 FACT BOOK

For more information about the City's population, check out the **City of Fairfax Fact Book.**

The first comprehensive development plan for the City was adopted in June 1968, with amendments in 1971 and 1973. New plans were adopted in 1975, 1982, 1988, and 2004 with amendments in 1983, 1991, 1993, 1997, and 2012. In addition to the Comprehensive Plan updates, many individual studies and plans have been completed over the years as shown in the diagram below. This Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2019 and amended in 2024, incorporates and builds on many of the goals and strategies found in those studies as well as other plans and City policies not identified below.



Structure of the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is a guide for the future growth of the City, focusing on community needs through 2035. Guidance and policy recommendations are provided through a vision, guiding principles, goals, outcomes, and actions, as described below.

- The **Vision** is the aspirational statement for the City in 2035;
- **Guiding Principles** are content-specific statements;
- **Goals** are general statements of the ideals toward which the City strives;
- **Outcomes** define what success looks like for each Goal; and
- **Actions** are the specific steps necessary to realize each Goal and Outcome.

The 14 Guiding Principles, as provided on pages 7-9, are categorized into five chapters: **Land Use, Multimodal Transportation, Environment and Sustainability, Economic Vitality, and Community Services**. Each chapter includes an introduction that provides background on the topic and a description of existing conditions, as well as opportunities and challenges facing the City that inform some of the policies suggested through the Comprehensive Plan. Additional

background information, Goals, Outcomes, and Actions are then provided for each Guiding Principle. Goals, Outcomes, and Actions, can also be found in the stand-alone Implementation Guide, which is revised on a regular basis to track the City's progress on meeting its Goals.

This Comprehensive Plan is supported by two appendices:

- **Appendix A – Chesapeake Bay Preservation Plan** identifies and characterizes the City's water resources and addresses the effects of land use planning and development on water quality in accordance with the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act.
- **Appendix B - Transportation Practices and Policy** provides additional information on some of the innovative practices discussed in the Multimodal Transportation Chapter.

Supporting maps, graphs, and figures are provided throughout this document.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

- Document describing a community's vision for how it wants to physically grow and develop in the near future (10 to 20 years)
- Provides guidance on land use, transportation, housing, economic development, environment, public facilities, parks, arts, and historic preservation
- Policy document for decision-making that informs zoning and budget decisions, i.e., the Capital Improvement Program (the five-year plan for physical improvements in the City – facilities, infrastructure, etc.)

VISION

In 2035, the City of Fairfax
is a vibrant, 21st century community supported by
a strong, sustainable economy.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In 2035, Fairfax is a city with...

...a close-knit community and a population that is diverse in its culture, demographics, and lifestyles, that capitalizes on its location in the center of the growing region and with easy access to the nation's capital.

Land Use



...inviting neighborhoods, each with its own unique character.



Neighborhoods

...a choice of housing types that meet the needs of our community.



Housing

...an economy that cultivates and promotes business success and entrepreneurial opportunities for large, small, and independent businesses and capitalizes on national, regional and intellectual partnerships.

Economic Vitality



Commercial Corridors and Activity Centers



Photo Credit: Hord Coplan Macht

...flourishing centers of commercial and mixed-use activity that include an assortment of grocery stores, restaurants, cafes, entertainment venues, retail stores, offices, and housing.

...a thriving cultural arts program that supports a variety of special events, art spaces and performance venues.

Cultural Arts



Multimodal Transportation



...options for residents to easily, safely, and efficiently move within and between neighborhoods either by walking, bicycling, taking public transportation or driving.

Community Design and Historic Preservation



...architecture that contributes to a vibrant, creative place and complements our historic character.

...inviting, well-maintained parks, trails, open spaces and multi-generational community centers.

Parks and Recreation



Education



...world-class community schools and a best-in-class education from preschool to post-high school that prepares students to be productive, responsible members of society, capable of competing in the global economy and motivated to pursue life-long learning.

...sustainable practices that preserve, conserve, reuse and recycle resources.

Sustainability Initiatives



...a healthy ecosystem of naturally flowing streams, native plants, wildlife, contiguous natural habitat areas, and a healthy tree population.



Natural Environment

Government and Public Safety



...exceptional governmental, police and fire safety services.

...safe, well-maintained infrastructure and use of advanced technology.

Infrastructure and Utilities



Planning Process

Development of the Comprehensive Plan was based on a three-phase process beginning with information collection, followed by analysis and recommendations. The Multimodal Transportation Plan was prepared through a parallel process and integrated into the final Comprehensive Plan.

The information collection phase included references to previous plans and studies that helped inform the Comprehensive Plan, and input provided by members of the community, including residents, business owners, City Council, City boards and commissions, other stakeholders (George Mason University, Fairfax County, etc.), and City staff. During the information collection phase, staff also developed the Fact Book, a summary of City data, from physical conditions to demographics and service analysis.

Based on the previous plans and studies referenced, input collected from the community, and data from the Fact Book, a series of goals and outcomes were developed for each of the guiding principles. These goals and outcomes were reviewed with the

Planning Commission and City boards and commissions. The same process was followed to develop actions for the guiding principles. Goals, outcomes, and actions for each guiding principle encompass the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan and provide the foundation for the overall document.

Final revisions to the Comprehensive Plan were based on review by members of the community through public open houses, online forums, and Planning Commission and City Council meetings. The Comprehensive Plan was adopted by City Council on February 12, 2019 (R-19-03) after recommendation by the Planning Commission (PC-19-02).

Code of Virginia Section 15.2-2230 requires that the Comprehensive Plan be reviewed at least once every five years to determine if it should be amended. While the City's Comprehensive Plan is amended as needed based on specific City projects or land use requests, a formal and complete review was conducted in 2023 and 2024 led by the Planning Commission with support from City Council, the community,

City boards and commissions, and other stakeholders. The amended Comprehensive Plan was adopted on October 8, 2024.



Statutory Requirements

The comprehensive plan serves as a locality’s primary decision-making document for land use and development. It establishes the intent and goals of the community to influence development in both the private and public sectors and should be relied upon as an initial source that directs users to appropriate reports or strategic plans where necessary.

State law governing the development of a comprehensive plan (Section 15.2-2223 of the Code of Virginia) requires every county, city, and town to adopt a plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction. The Code further requires that comprehensive plans be reviewed every five years to ensure that the plan is responsive to current circumstances and that its goals continue to be supported by the citizenry; however, the City should consistently be prepared to make interim changes to the plan because necessary changes can result from the completion of strategic plans or changes to other City policies. The Planning Commission is tasked with preparing the plan and recommending it to the City Council for adoption.

The Code of Virginia includes both required and optional content for comprehensive plans. Required provisions relate to issues that are fundamental to the plan itself, such as long-range recommendations for development and methods of implementation. In order to address what are perceived as critical issues statewide, the Code of Virginia specifically requires that all comprehensive plans address both affordable housing and transportation infrastructure.

Authority

While the Comprehensive Plan communicates a vision for future land use and development in the City, the zoning ordinance provides the regulatory mechanism to ensure that new development and changes in land uses are consistent with this vision. Section 15.2-2232 of the Virginia Code states that a comprehensive plan “shall control the general or approximate location, character and extent of each feature shown on the plan.” Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan is one of the approval considerations for zoning text amendments, zoning map amendments, special use permits, and special exceptions to the zoning ordinance.

When any new development is proposed that requires a land use action not consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, the applicant should request a modification to the Comprehensive Plan as well, in order to keep the two documents consistent. Such modifications must be reviewed by the Planning Commission and approved by City Council. This provides flexibility for the Comprehensive Plan to adjust to market conditions and design trends, but ensures that any such changes are reviewed and considered within the greater context of the City’s vision.

In addition to guiding decisions on land use and development, the Comprehensive Plan includes guidance on investment for transportation and infrastructure. Section 15.2-2232 of the Code of Virginia requires that no public facilities – such as streets, parks, utilities, or public buildings – shall be approved or constructed unless deemed to be in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan by the Planning Commission. The Comprehensive Plan should be used as a reference for all land use and budget decisions. Any budget item in the Capital Improvement Program should support at least one of the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

Implementation

In addition to providing guidance on land use and budget decisions, the Comprehensive Plan includes numerous actions to be taken by the City or its affiliates in order to achieve the vision of the plan. A separate Implementation Guide has been developed in support of the Comprehensive Plan to track progress on implementation of these actions. This is accomplished through an implementation matrix that provides the lead responsibility, timeframe for initiation and timeframe for completion of each action. Where appropriate, performance metrics are listed for goals to provide a mechanism for determining whether the implemented actions are achieving the desired result.

The Implementation Guide is a separate document from the Comprehensive Plan because it is updated regularly as progress is made toward achieving each action. The lead responsibilities, timeframes and performance metrics are also subject to change as more information is obtained in support of specific actions.

City of Fairfax

2035 Comprehensive Plan IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE UPDATES

July 22, 2024

