



A STRATEGIC VISION

FOR THE FUTURE OF WARREN COUNTY, VIRGINIA



November 30, 2018

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November 30, 2018



THE VISION

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Introduction

Planning helps us make decisions today with an eye towards our desired future. Warren County citizens, elected officials, business leaders, and many others came together in 2018 to craft a Strategic Vision that will help the Board of Supervisors confidently make decisions with the community's desired future in mind.

The County will use the Strategic Vision to show how it wants to thrive and grow in the future. This will provide confidence to the private and public sector about where their investments will be most productive, while also preserving our County's most valued natural and cultural resources.

The Strategic Vision will also set the direction for an update to the County's Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan is the County's official policy guide for future development related decisions. It is long range in nature and provides a picture of how the community wishes to develop over the next 15 to 20 years.

The Board of Supervisors did not develop the Strategic Vision alone. The process section of this report describes how citizens and stakeholder involvement were instrumental in shaping the Strategic Vision.

Vision

A primary outcome of this process is the development and affirmation of a new Vision for the future of the County. This Vision was vetted and affirmed by the participants of a Vision Retreat, which convened several community leaders on September 13, 2018 – including the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission – to review citizen input and craft the following Vision. The new Vision for the future of Warren County is presented below:

Our Vision

Warren County will be a thriving community that retains its safe, scenic, friendly and inviting character with leadership that puts community first and works cooperatively to:

- ⚙️ Preserve the quality of our clean water, air, natural resources and scenic landscape;
- ⚙️ Grow gradually at a rate that supports the local economy but does not place stress on County services or natural resources. This has historically meant a 2% to 3% annual growth rate.
- ⚙️ Maintain our small-town character and rural lifestyle while providing quality amenities for shopping, recreation and entertainment;
- ⚙️ Enhance opportunities for quality wage jobs that allow residents to live, work and raise families in the County;
- ⚙️ Support an excellent school environment that retains quality teachers and graduates the next generation of leaders;
- ⚙️ Provide a variety of housing choices to allow our citizens and workforce to live prosperously and age with dignity within their community;
- ⚙️ Deliver quality services such as fire, safety, and law enforcement, and provide safe and modern roads and other infrastructure within a framework of balanced taxes and sound fiscal management.
- ⚙️ Make Warren County a place of choice in Virginia, where people choose to live, prosper, raise families, grow businesses and stay a lifetime.



STRATEGIES

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Strategies

Based on the work done by the participants in the Vision Retreat, and their responses to a follow-up survey, the tables in this section show the preferred strategies to implement the County’s Vision in the coming months and years. The strategies below were derived from a variety of sources, including existing strategies in the County’s Comprehensive Plan, input generated in the Vision Retreat, and from the County’s consulting team. They are ranked by priority according to the input given by the Retreat participants.

The strategies are organized into the 10 policy categories from the County Comprehensive Plan. While the tables list the primary strategies that were developed in this process, under each category there are also several additional strategies that emerged from the follow-up survey of Retreat participants. These are labeled, “Other Strategies to Consider.”

Growth and Development

| Strategy | Priority Level | | |
|---|----------------|--------|-----|
| | High | Medium | Low |
| 1. Maintain a 2% to 3% annual household growth rate that supports the local economy, but preserves the County’s natural resources and ensures that services keep pace with development. | | | |
| 2. Direct development into places where infrastructure supports growth and away from sensitive environments. | | | |
| 3. Use the County development codes to support cluster subdivisions and rural villages with a mix of uses and a walkable form. | | | |
| 4. Use design guidelines to encourage new development that is compatible with the County’s historic character. | | | |
| 5. Use zoning to ensure that scenic viewsheds are preserved, particularly from the Shenandoah National Park and the Shenandoah River. | | | |
| 6. Encourage the development of neighborhoods that allow people to safely age in place. | | | |

Other Strategies to Consider

- Provide more housing in the County for people ages 55 and over.
- Provide incentives and remove hindrances to infill development.
- Emphasize manufacturing and high tech employment in land use and development policies.

Housing

| Strategy | Priority Level | | |
|--|----------------|--------|-----|
| | High | Medium | Low |
| 1. Support development of workforce housing through density bonuses. | | | |
| 2. Support affordable housing by encouraging mixed-use development. | | | |
| 3. Encourage the development of retirement communities. | | | |
| 4. Identify suitable site locations for workforce housing. | | | |
| 5. Support development of workforce housing by allowing for more by right development of a range of housing types including multi-family and townhomes in some zoning districts. | | | |
| 6. Partner with local organizations to support their efforts to improve or increase housing stock. | | | |
| 7. Partner with faith-based and non-profit organizations to build affordable housing. | | | |
| 8. Support workforce housing by providing down payment assistance or first-time homebuyer counseling services for County employees. | | | |

Other Strategies to Consider

- Build affordable housing on excess land owned by the County and school system.
- Encourage alternatives to driving so that families can spend more of their income on housing.

Education

| Strategy | Priority Level | | |
|--|----------------|--------|-----|
| | High | Medium | Low |
| 1. Increase teacher pay and benefits to levels needed to retain the best teachers in the Northern Shenandoah Valley and attract teachers from adjacent counties. | | | |
| 2. Use a retention bonus beginning at year 4 to retain the best teachers. | | | |
| 3. Defray school expansion costs through proffers. | | | |
| 4. Coordinate expansion and improvement of school facilities with new private development proposals. | | | |

Other Strategies to Consider

- Identify potential budget savings that could be used to increase teacher salaries.

Open Space and Farmland Preservation

| Strategy | Priority Level | | |
|--|----------------|--------|-----|
| | High | Medium | Low |
| 1. Restrict development of environmentally sensitive areas. | | | |
| 2. Help develop and market the County's local agricultural produce to regional markets, such as the D.C. area. | | | |
| 3. Preserve farmland, open space, and forests through Agricultural and Forestal zoning districts. | | | |
| 4. Encourage protected farmland and open space through voluntary measures including conservation easements, scenic easements, purchase of development rights, or transfer of development rights. | | | |
| 5. Preserve forests through zoning code provisions that prohibit clear cutting. | | | |

Other Strategies to Consider

- Encourage development of agribusiness by allowing more by right activities in agriculturally-zoned areas and eliminating outdated or overly complicated regulations.

Infrastructure and Transportation

| Strategy | Priority Level | | |
|---|----------------|--------|-----|
| | High | Medium | Low |
| 1. Direct growth to areas where infrastructure can handle it. | | | |
| 2. Reduce the number of private access points along major highways and gateways to maintain highway capacity and support a walkable environment with accessible infrastructure. | | | |
| 3. Manage the aesthetics of development along major highways and gateways through zoning overlays. | | | |
| 4. Limit extensions of the Town’s water and sewer infrastructure to outlying areas to minimize sprawling development. | | | |
| 5. Promote alternatives to driving by building walking and bicycling routes and mixed-use developments. | | | |
| 6. Allow small sewage treatment facilities to promote the development of rural villages. | | | |
| 7. Adopt a fix-it-first policy where maintenance of existing facilities is prioritized over expansion. | | | |
| 8. Create a regional water authority. | | | |

Other Strategies to Consider

- Continue to fund a local match for state revenue sharing dollars to maximize transportation improvements.

Law Enforcement, Fire and Rescue Services

| Strategy | Priority Level | | |
|--|----------------|--------|-----|
| | High | Medium | Low |
| 1. Maintain the hybrid quality fire and rescue paid staff and volunteer system. | | | |
| 2. Consolidate support services for law enforcement, fire, and rescue such as E-911. | | | |
| 3. Evaluate the effectiveness of services before proceeding with expansion. | | | |
| 4. Use proffers where permitted to fund capital improvements. | | | |

Other Strategies to Consider

- Identify potential cost savings by combining job responsibilities where possible, such as assigning desk sergeants to school officer duty.

Economic Development

| Strategy | Priority Level | | |
|---|----------------|--------|-----|
| | High | Medium | Low |
| 1. Recruit businesses and industries that offer a higher pay level so that more people can afford to both live and work in the County. | | | |
| 2. Maintain industrial and commercial land uses to make up 30% to 35% of the tax base. | | | |
| 3. Focus industrial and commercial development on Route 340/522 and at the Linden Interchange. | | | |
| 4. Use incentives such as EDA grants, research, technology, or enterprise zones to attract new employers. | | | |
| 5. Invest in the industrial parks to make them more impressive and attractive to businesses. | | | |
| 6. Emphasize projects that improve quality of life and maximize the County's natural and built assets – such as the National Park, river, and downtown Front Royal – as a way to attract higher wage employers that value quality of life and locating where the workforce wants to live. | | | |

Other Strategies to Consider

- Pursue funding for an interchange on Interstate 66 to support development of Happy Creek.
- Emphasize the development of available sites for manufacturing rather than warehousing.

Tourism

| Strategy | Priority Level | | |
|---|----------------|--------|-----|
| | High | Medium | Low |
| 1. Use zoning tools to protect historic sites, viewsheds, and buffers to the Shenandoah River, Shenandoah National Park, battlefields, and the Appalachian Trail. | | | |
| 2. Invest in recreational facilities that provide access to natural features, such as greenways, hiking and biking paths, and public river access. | | | |
| 3. Help nurture small heritage- and nature-based businesses with the potential to grow the County’s tourism industry. | | | |
| 4. Support agritourism enterprises. | | | |
| 5. Collaborate with the Town to jointly develop and promote the outdoor recreation economy. | | | |
| 6. Develop a wayfinding signage program to promote the community’s destinations. | | | |

Other Strategies to Consider

- Invest in the public golf course.
- Clean up dilapidated buildings at the gateways to Front Royal.