

**James City County Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Ordinance
Planning Commission Public Forum
Tuesday, August 24, 2010**

**WILLIAMSBURG AREA ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®
DISCUSSION POINTS**

The Williamsburg Area Association of REALTORS® is a professional trade association that represents the real estate profession and property owners throughout the communities of James City County and the City of Williamsburg, as well as a portion of both New Kent and York Counties. The Association, with its 500-plus members, works diligently to promote pro-housing and pro-business interests and supports legislative, regulatory and political efforts that reflect our mission.

Inherent to the Association are five guiding principles upon which we have based our comments.

1. Provide Housing Opportunity and Choice

Homeownership is the cornerstone of the American dream and deserves a preferred place in our system of values as it contributes to community responsibility; civic, economic, business and employment stability; family security and overall well being of a community. These objectives can be met through market-driven housing approaches that foster a wide-range of urban, suburban and rural housing choices at all price levels to suit a diverse population.

2. Build Better Communities

Real estate of all types flourishes best in livable communities that offer a high quality of life at a reasonable cost. Livable communities offer a variety of affordable housing choices, good schools, low crime, quality public services, efficient transportation systems, ample recreation and park areas, open space, strong employment base and an economically viable commercial sector. To promote these essential livable community elements, growth policies should encourage market-driven and culturally diverse growth patterns that sustain and enhance a community's quality of life.

3. Protect the Environment

To maintain a region's quality of life and to protect the environment, governments should consider policies and programs that aid the control of pollution; provide for programs that encourage preservation of natural resources, significant lands and properties of historic significance; and further encourage, through incentives, the protection of endangered species, aquifers, rivers/streams, agricultural lands, wetlands, scenic vistas, natural areas, and open space.

4. Protect Private Property Rights

Private property rights are fundamental to our free-market economic system and are protected by the 5th and 14th Amendments to the United States Constitution. Our

nation's economy depends on the preservation of the right to freely own, use and transfer real property.

5. Implement Fair and Reasonable Public Sector Fiscal Measures

To support adequately the infrastructure needs of communities resulting from growth, governments should cooperate in the adoption of balanced, fair, equitable and incentive-based approaches to finance and pay for the development, expansion and maintenance of roads, schools, water and sewer facilities. Revenue and financing mechanisms established to pay for necessary infrastructure costs should be shared proportionally by those segments of the population served by improvements and not just be borne by property owners.

Relative to the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances, and specifically to the topics tonight regarding commercial and mixed-use land use districts, we offer the following comments and observations:

- We all know that business and industry are vitally necessary for a balanced tax base, employment, the health of a community and the growth of a community.
- Local real estate professionals are of the opinion that the County's current commercial and mixed use districts are old and outdated, allowing for very little in the way of "new" industry and commerce--i.e. web-based businesses, alternative energy industries, etc.
- The current districts are inflexible and do not allow for future industries tomorrow that none of us can predict today.
- The County should be highly creative about permitted uses in the various districts to maintain and expand current businesses, and to attract new businesses.
- The County should establish real incentives as part of creating more flexibility in the commercial districts. In other words, the County needs to do more to entice businesses to stay and to locate here. While streamlining the permit process and waiving fees are appreciated, it may not be enough in today's economic climate. There should be additional incentives—such as tax credits for the number of or types of jobs created, tax abatements for certain businesses, more technology incubators and enterprise zone approvals, etc.
- The County should encourage developments which provide mixed-use development and support design flexibility to promote mixing of various types of residential and non-residential uses and structures.
- The County should approve the Economic Opportunity land use designation, which through the Comprehensive Plan is designed to increase the non-residential tax base and stimulate the creation of jobs. This designation also will

promote mixed-cost housing with a strong emphasis on workforce housing and higher density development. We believe that the housing component of the Economic Opportunity land use designation is the key factor in driving its success, and we offer our assistance to work with the County on the housing sector within these areas.

The Association follows trends in today's marketplace, and we can work with the County to share the features that buyers many want including walkable communities, green design, small lot size and small square footage, as examples. We are working with a local government in another community on its zoning ordinance re-write, and have provided policy makers and staff with details on current trends in the homebuyers market. It appears that those details are providing beneficial to that community as it works toward framing its future land use and zoning decisions for its neighborhoods and residents. We can provide the same information to James City County.

It is through the zoning designation process, specifically commercial and mixed-use zoning, that James City County can increase the balance of our tax base so that less pressure is applied to residential properties.

We support the creation of jobs and area businesses so that additional opportunities are created for a skillful, young workforce. A strong local economy results in a diverse local community. However, the backbone of any of these job opportunities also is a strong housing market that allows employees to live and work in the same place.

To that end, we ask that the following be incorporated into the new ordinances:

- Encourage a balanced mixture of commercial, industrial and residential land uses, including redevelopment.
- Incentivize developers to incorporate workforce housing into their developments by allowing for bonus densities.
- Encourage infill development, the redevelopment of existing parcels and the adaptive reuse of existing buildings to efficiently use infrastructure and natural resources.

WAAR offers itself as a resource to the County. Having worked on a variety of local government enabling legislation at the state level, we can provide specific language and details that have the potential to be very positive and fit into the County's goals and objectives.

We look forward to engaging with you in zoning, land use and subdivision discussions, and to developing solutions in order to create an achievable vision for our community.

