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Development Standards

The County has done an outstanding job over the past several decades influencing the quality built environment we all enjoy. The challenge for our collective future is how we can continue to achieve a quality built environment within the broader context of various environmental, economic and societal sustainability constraints. Water comes to mind immediately. Landscaping requirements should be revised to significantly incentivize indigenous, drought-tolerant vegetation as required minimums and discourage the establishment of water-thirsty grass.

More broadly, I would encourage the County to once and for all incorporate the Builders for the Bay principals for water quality improvements that have languished since their consensus adoption in 2004. Development standards for setbacks, sidewalks, driveways, infill and redevelopment, street width, street length, rights-of-way, cul-de-sacs, parking ratios and parking codes are but a few of the items where consensus was reached between the development community, citizens and the conservation community and all levels of government. How often do we find that, consensus? Whenever we do, we should act swiftly to formalize such consensus, and thereafter, to work collaboratively with these stakeholders on additional policy areas where consensus might be achieved.

The Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act and local ordinances have been around since 1989. While the overall success of the program Statewide to date is arguable, the importance of continuing to manage stormwater runoff cannot be overstated. But James City County owes it to itself and to its existing and future residents and businesses to take a long hard look at how we implement the Act. James City County is

unique in its arbitrary max. 60% impervious cover requirements. It has become an absolute prescription for sprawl, which most serious students of growth management and environmental protection would say is among the most damaging growth patterns possible. Other equally or more progressive communities establish a downstream water quality standard and challenge the environmental and engineering design communities to use their knowledge, experience and creativity to achieve compliance. If there is evidence that JCC's program results in better downstream water quality compared to other jurisdictions, then I say keep up the good work. But there has been no such evidence produced to date, after more than 20 years.

Beyond inducing sprawl, this arbitrary requirement makes James City County less competitive than other communities in the Tidewater economic development arena because prospective businesses have to purchase that much more land in JCC to accommodate their planned physical plant. James City County would be well served by using appropriate environmental policy and technology to achieve its environmental goals, and planning and zoning strategies to achieve its community development/growth management goals. But by using one approach to accomplish the other, and vice versa, unsatisfactory results are sure to continue.

On another note, I am reminded of the controversy at John Deere some 5+ years ago, over their desire for a larger sign and one of more vivid colors. As I recall, there were ordinance provisions and policy decisions taken that together prevented Deere from achieving its signage goals. I would encourage the County to examine carefully the signage provisions for planned industrial and business parks, and to work towards an overall signage philosophy which embraces the value that quality signage represents to our cherished corporate citizens, while cognizant of the impact on views from a variety of adjacent or nearby sensitive properties. In particular, I would encourage the County to

adopt significantly more favorable signage opportunities for businesses located along Interstate 64 and major employment/industrial areas. We enjoy many longstanding corporate citizens, of whom we should be proud to boast to all who pass through our region that they selected James City County and are flourishing because of it.

Finally, form based codes are an attempt to prescribe the physical form of urban and semi-urban areas with the intent of creating livable, walkable and functional compact places where a variety of transportation modes can serve both residents and businesses. Form based codes support a Smart Growth approach to community development, and we should consider their adoption more broadly for higher intensity areas of the County, where population and employment centers can best be accommodated. The New Town master plan competition was essentially an exercise in form based planning. Much has been learned from the experience of New Town. Standing on the shoulders of those giants, we can reach for even better and more functional contemporary places to live, work and play, and indeed, that is the future we should pursue to avoid continued sprawl.