

April 16, 2009

Mr. Chris Henderson
Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee
James City County
101 Mounts Bay Road
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Dear Chris,

Thank you for your two observations following the presentation of "J4C Comments on the 2008 Comprehensive Plan" to the Steering Committee. I circulated among our membership your requests for more information, and I am writing to provide our collective response.

In the first instance, you correctly pointed out that our group remains steadfast in opposing any land use change or rezoning outside the PSA despite the fact that the PSA has not been completely effective in quelling development and population growth in that area. Why, you asked, doesn't our organization come up with a better idea to protect the rural character of our county, or, in the words of the 2003 Comp Plan and the 2008 BCTF, "to control residential growth while preserving the County's natural beauty" and "to preserve rural land," and "to preserve the uniqueness of James City County, its historic legacy, its rural and forested area and its sense of community." There is near universal agreement that these should be the primary goals of the 2008 Comprehensive Plan, and J4C agrees that neither the PSA nor the Rural Lands designation is a perfect tool for achieving those goals.

Please keep in mind that our PSA threshold is just one of the three guiding principles that we recommend as a package to achieve county goals. The other two are:

- approve no change without an assessment of the cumulative impact of such change upon the environment, traffic, water supply and financial health of the county, and
- approve no change that will accommodate a population greater than that already projected by right

J4C intended these three principles to be applied as one, and we believe that, taken together, they can at least prevent population from climbing even higher. For example, approving the several land use applications along the west side of Centerville Road could lead to several hundred homes beyond those permitted by right. This growth carries significant implications for traffic, school enrollment, flooding, pollution, water usage and so on. In the absence of, or even resistance to, more sophisticated initiatives by the county,

our group feels it has no choice but to rely upon these three guidelines (although our report did list several recommendations that would further protect our open space and the county's rural lands; please see the Land Use section). As you know, we are supported in our resolve by Milton Herd and Renaissance Planning in the work they have submitted to your committee.

It is also worth noting that access to county water and sewers carries significant value (see *Report On Water Line Extensions beyond the Primary Service Area*, DRAFT – March 6, 2009 - Renaissance Planning Group, Inc.), and these services can be used to barter for better site designs. Why simply give them away? We also pointed out that the county's practice of subsidizing wells outside the PSA works in direct opposition to county goals, and promotes the waste of a rapidly diminishing precious resource.

Finally, we must note that the county has no political will to employ more sophisticated land use tools in the Rural Lands. We mentioned during our presentation and in our report that county supervisors commissioned a study of this complex issue in 2006. A group of very knowledgeable people, including two supervisors, several planning commission members, professionals from the development profession and other stakeholders labored over an extended period to write numerous recommendations on how the county could honor the wishes of a vast majority of its residents. Their report was submitted to the supervisors in late 2006, where it was consigned to the black hole of county government (keeping company, perhaps, with the many ignored J4C reports and recommendations to suffer the same fate). Not only were none of the recommendations implemented, they were not even discussed.

I hope you will understand that until better tools are adopted by county government, we will continue to oppose changes to land designations and rezonings outside the PSA and the Rural Lands, or any changes resulting in greater population or other harmful cumulative impacts on the community.

Your second request was for J4C to refine the 129,000 population projection that we made in our Cumulative Impact Analysis. You are probably correct in noting that there are many empty lots that will never carry a dwelling. Assuming no rezonings and no extension of the PSA (another reason for our three guiding principles), the 129,000 figure is therefore likely to be on the high side. What can be stated with near certainty is that the population will grow to at least 90,000 based on already approved subdivisions. That is what our figure of 11,576 approved-but-not-built lots would strongly suggest.

You might say that our projection is a worst case scenario, except that the projection does not allow for the type of rezonings or land use changes that past boards have permitted. Should those rezoning practices continue, or if the many land use change applications before you are approved, then the J4C estimate could actually understate the potential population growth. In either case, it seems clear to us that your committee needs a starting figure – a point of departure against which you can assess how population relates to county goals. How much can county population grow before our government fails to “control residential growth while preserving the County’s natural beauty, preserve rural land, and preserve the uniqueness of James City County, its historic legacy, its rural and forested area and its sense of community?” If the existing population doubles, can county government still “Ensure that all citizens, especially youth and seniors, have safe, affordable and convenient access to beneficial programs, services and activities” at a reasonable cost? If so, then your job is made easier; if not, then county government must either move aggressively to reduce the potential for population growth, or begin explaining to county residents why county goals cannot be achieved and why the quality of their lives cannot be protected.

Our group remains indebted to you and to your fellow committee members for your efforts on behalf of county residents.

Sincerely,

Jack Haldeman, for the J4C Executive Committee and Board

cc: Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee
Virginia Gazette
Williamsburg Yorktown Daily