



# TOWN OF OCCOQUAN

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## PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

### September 24, 2024 | 6:30 PM

1. **Call to Order**
2. **Citizens' Time** - Members of the public may, for three minutes, present for the purpose of directing attention to or requesting action on matters not included on the prepared agenda. These matters shall be referred to the appropriate town official(s) for investigation and report. Citizens may address issues as they come up on the agenda if advance notice is given during 'Citizens' Time
3. **Approval of Minutes**
  - a. July 23, 2024 Meeting Minutes
4. **Reports**
  - a. Town Council Report
  - b. Deputy Town Manager Report
  - c. Architectural Review Board Report
5. **Discussion Items**
  - a. Discussion on Town Council Response to Strategic Planning Recommendations
  - b. Riverwalk Planning Update
  - c. Planning Commission Priorities Update
    - i. Riverside Station (Formerly North Woodbridge Town Center)
    - ii. Alpine X
6. **Adjournment**

Eliot Perkins  
Chair, Planning Commission



# TOWN OF OCCOQUAN PLANNING COMMISSION

## Agenda Communication

<b>3. Approval of Minutes</b>	<b>Meeting Date:</b> September 24, 2024
<b>3A: July 23, 2024 Meeting Minutes</b>	

**Attachments:** a. July 23, 2024 Meeting Minutes

**Submitted by:** Matt Whitmoyer  
Deputy Town Manager

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**Explanation and Summary:**

This is a request to approve the meeting minutes from July 23, 2024 for the Planning Commission Meeting.

**Proposed/Suggested Motion:**

"I move to approve the meeting minutes from July 23, 2024 as presented."

OR

Other action the Planning Commission deems appropriate.



**TOWN OF OCCOQUAN  
PLANNING COMMISSION**  
Town Hall - 314 Mill Street, Occoquan, VA 22125

**MEETING DATE: 2024-07-23**

**MEETING TIME: 6:30 PM**

**Present:** Chairperson Eliot Perkins, Commissioners Darryl Hawkins, Robert Love, Ralph Newell, Don Wood

**Absent:** Ann Kisling

**Town Staff:** Matt Whitmoyer, Deputy Town Manager; Doug Morgan (remote), Assistant Zoning Administrator; Adam Linn, Town Manager

**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 pm

**2. Citizen Comments**

None

**3. Approval of Minutes**

a. May 28, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Love motioned to approve the May 28, 2024 meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Hawkins seconded. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

**4. Reports**

a. Town Council Report

Chair Perkins reported that Town Council discussed the Planning Commission's Strategic Planning document and will be giving "marching orders" to the OPC.

b. Deputy Town Manager Report

Deputy Town Manager Whitmoyer outlined the following items:

- Town Council recognized Ryan Somma and Carol Bailey for their contributions to the Planning Commission and Architectural Review Board, respectively.
- Town Council designated the 100 block of Poplar Alley as "Ogle Harris Way."
- Town Council designated the island under the Route 123 Bridge as Craighill Isle
- Stormwater pipe replacement (Union and Commerce Streets). Commissioner Love commended the level of staff effort involved in this project.
- Belmont Bay is moving towards a change to its proffers to make the area more residential and less mixed use.

b. Architectural Review Board Report

Commissioner Hawkins spoke of continuing work on Rockledge Mansion.

**5. Discussion Items**

a. Discussion on Changes in Density

Accessory Dwellings: Chair Perkins announced that there will be a joint Town Council / Planning Commission public hearing on August 6, 2024 at 7pm on the proposed Accessory Dwelling Units ordinance.

Presentation by Doug Morgan and questions from the Planning Commissioners. Key discussion points and questions were:

- The Zoning Administrator is looking for clear direction from the Planning Commission to move forward on a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) on increasing density in certain areas of Town in anticipation of revising the Town's Comprehensive Plan.
- The Future Land Use map is a guiding tool that does not specify particular future zoning districts in order to allow for a range of different zoning options in the future for various parcels.
- The Town needs to understand why it may want to increase density. For example, some retail outlets will need to know there is a certain "number of rooftops" (i.e., consumer demand) before locating a community.
- Changing the future Land Use Map to reflect areas where higher density is proposed allows the Town to consider potential rezoning if a developer is interested in building a higher density structure. However, changing the Future Land Use Map for additional density does not obligate the Town to approve a rezoning if it does meet the direction that the Town wants to go.
- Goals that communities generally have when considering increasing residential density might include:
  - Sense of place
  - Walkability
  - Open green space
  - Dog parks
  - Professional offices
  - Businesses that bring revenue, so that residential property taxes can be held stable.
  - Ability to walk to the grocery store, schools and parks
  - Tax base
- Chair Perkins quoted from the Comprehensive Plan. "To seek to encourage the redevelopment of commercial areas in a manner which will ensure the continued recognition of the Town's unique character combining residential and commercial development in an aesthetic and harmonious way."

Questions from the Planning Commission:

- Chair Perkins requested clear definitions of the zoning districts and zoning district designations.

- Commissioner Love questioned the disparity between the colors used in the current zoning map and those used in the future land use map.
- Chair Perkins suggested the Commission should use the time leading up to revision of the Comprehensive Plan to learn more about the pro's and con's of increasing residential density.

Motion: Commissioner Love moved to continue due diligence on assessing the land use and density initiative. Commissioner Wood seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Next Steps:

- Chair Perkins asked Town Staff for key definitions of zoning designations and to take steps to increase the Commission's comfort level with the two maps.
- Chair Perkins reminded the Commission that the Town Council will soon have a list of the approved action items from the Commission's Strategic Plan.

## **6. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:32 pm

*Minutes Prepared by Don Wood, Planning Commission Secretary  
With revisions from Matt Whitmoyer, Planning Commission Liaison*



# TOWN OF OCCOQUAN PLANNING COMMISSION

## Agenda Communication

<b>5. Discussion Items</b>	<b>Meeting Date:</b> September 24, 2024
<b>5A: Discussion on Town Council Response to Strategic Planning Recommendations</b>	

**Attachments:**

- a. Report to Town Council
- b. Town Council Response Memo

**Submitted by:** Matt Whitmoyer  
Deputy Town Manager

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### **Explanation and Summary:**

This is a discussion item to discuss the Town Council’s feedback on the Planning Commission’s strategic planning report to the Council and determine next steps for the Commission’s strategic planning recommendations.

The Town Council recommends that the Commission address four high-level areas of the report and submit a revised report as part of the Commission’s annual report in December.

The four areas are the following: (1) Clarity of Purpose, (2) Enhanced Due Diligence, (3) Consistency Among Recommendations, and (4) Timing. Revising the report to reflect these considerations and submitting it as part of the Planning Commission’s annual report in December will allow the Town Council to incorporate the recommendations into the budget in a timely and informed manner.

### **Background**

On April 16, 2024, the Planning Commission submitted its report on Strategic Planning Recommendations to Town Council. The Town Council reviewed the report and provided feedback at its September 17, 2024 meeting.



# **Planning Commission Strategic Planning Recommendations to Town Council**

March 26, 2024

## **Occoquan Planning Commission**

Eliot Perkins, Chair

Ralph Newell, Vice Chair

Ryan Somma, Secretary

Darryl Hawkins, Commissioner

Ann Kisling, Commissioner

Robert Love, Commissioner

Don Wood, Commissioner

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## Introduction

Starting in Winter 2023, the Planning Commission, using the *Vision 2026 Comprehensive Plan* as a guide, engaged in a strategic planning effort to formulate strategic themes and corresponding goals for the Planning Commission's work over the next several years. Using those themes and goals, the Commission then worked in groups to identify and evaluate specific actions for the Town to take in order to meet the Commission's goals and build off the work of the Comprehensive Plan. To realize its goals, the Planning Commission will need the support of the Town Council and asks for its feedback, approval, and action on a number of items outlined in this report.

The following report is divided into sections based off each thematic area and corresponding goals created by the Planning Commission with a tiered list of action items for Town Council's feedback, approval, and/or action on. Action items are divided into First and Second Priority. The First Priority consists of short, near and long-term items that align with at least one theme of the Comprehensive Plan and that the Planning Commission is requesting Town Council feedback, approval, and/or action on. The Second Priority consists of longer-term items that the Commission has set aside for action at a later date but of which it wants to make the Council aware. Those First Priority items for Town Council review are contained in the green tables at the end of each section. Each table outlines the potential costs, staff time, implementation timeline, and Comprehensive Plan alignment associated with each item.

The thematic areas consist of the following:

- Leveraging the Natural Resources of the Town (Trail Town)
- Increasing Walkability, Connectivity, and Accessibility (Parking and Transportation)
- Protecting the Ecological and Public Health of the Town (Green Improvements)
- Fostering A Distinct Identity for Town (Placemaking and Beautification/Public Arts)
- Fostering Economic Development and Diversification (Business Support and Recruitment)

In the course of the strategic planning process, the Planning Commission noted a number of concepts repeated across the different work groups. The resulting action items are therefore presented in the "Cross-Cutting Recommendations" section as items to be implemented as compliments to all the other thematic areas.

# Trail Town Program – Leveraging the Natural Resources of the Town

## *Summary:*

With multiple regional and national cycling trails connecting the Town to other regional attractions; a prime location on the Occoquan River as a water trail; and a soon-to-be destination at the end of the Occoquan Greenway trail, Occoquan is a focal point for outdoor recreational traffic. This echoes Occoquan's history as a waypoint for travelers passing through over the old bridge and stopping to frequent town businesses. Occoquan is and has been a Trail Town. This recommendation includes actions to incorporate that character into the Town's programs and initiatives, promote that identity to visitors, and encourage travelers to stop in Town on their way to other destinations.

## *Goals:*

1. Cultivate and promote Occoquan's identity as a Trail Town with historical markers, wayfinding signage, and local attractions to bring outdoors enthusiasts into Town.
2. Establish reciprocal promotion between attractions and municipalities sharing trails with Occoquan via participation in regional summits, celebrations, and trail advocacy outside of the Town's jurisdiction.
3. Increase the value and accessibility of Tanyard Hill park as a local trail destination with a volunteer maintenance plan, trail connections to the Occoquan Greenway, crosswalks, and clearly marked parking.

## *First Priority Action Items:*

1. **Assess Community Input a Trail Town Program:** Solicit feedback from Town residents via a survey to assess community wants and needs for a trail town and use results to determine the vision and feasibility of a larger Trail Town program.
2. **Define an Occoquan Trail Town Vision:** Town Officials, Staff, and Citizens should collaborate on a shared vision of what a Trail Town program ultimately means and the "who, what, and how" of getting there.
3. **Town Council Passes a Resolution Recognizing the Community Values its Trails:** This resolution will follow the same format as previous resolutions establishing Occoquan as a Tree City USA or Bird Sanctuary.
4. **Enhance Entrance to Tanyard Hill Park:** Occoquan has a wonderful resource in this park and needs to protect and promote it. The Town should put up signage as part of entrance enhancement efforts (only item in cost estimate), a crosswalk from the parking lot due to the heavy commuter traffic, and clearly mark parking across the street from the park. Educational signage along the trail can also enhance the hiking experience.
5. **Coordinate Tanyard Hill Park Maintenance with Volunteers:** Set up a volunteer program for maintaining the trail in the park and connecting trails.
6. **Improve Trail Signage:**
  - o **Post a "Trail Town" Information Sign Near the Footbridge and/or 123 Bridge:** The model for this sign would be the signs at the trails gateway into Harper's Ferry, which provides a map of the region, illustrates the many trails connecting to the town, and the attractions to which they lead.
  - o **Post Signs for the Potomac National Heritage Trail:** As a signatory, Occoquan needs to honor its commitment to the PNHT memorandum of understanding by

placing signage for the trail at appropriate locations within Town.

Representatives at NVRC recommend having NPS install the signs.

7. **Present a Yearly Progress Update at the NVRC Trails Summit:** The NVRC has expressed a high level of interest in following Occoquan’s efforts to establish a Trail Town Program. This yearly summit provides the Town an opportunity to present an update on our progress, participate in workshops for Trails advocacy, and network with other municipalities to enhance nearby trails outside of our jurisdiction.

*Second Priority Action Items:*

1. **Work with Local Businesses to Promote Trail Town Status and Support Trail Users:** Encourage local businesses to take advantage of the potential business opportunities that come with the trail users who pass through Occoquan.
2. **Ensure Trail Connections Between Tanyard Hill Park and Occoquan Greenway:** A limitation for Tanyard Hill Park is that it is somewhat inaccessible on foot to Occoquan residents, who must walk outside of Town along Old Bridge Road to reach the park. Connecting the park to the Occoquan Greenway will provide an accessible route to residents. The trails could be created by professionals and maintained by volunteers.
3. **Lobby State for a Trail Town Designation:** The Town of Damascus in Shenandoah also considers itself a Trail Town servicing hikers on the Appalachian Trail. Occoquan can coordinate with this municipality to have Virginia create a Trail Town Designation.

*Items for Town Council Approval/Budget Consideration:*

Recommendations	Cost Estimate	Staff Effort (Low, Medium, High)	Timeline (Short, Near, and Long-term)	Comp Plan Alignment
<b>Assess Community Input on a Trail Town Program</b>	-	Low	Short	Circulation and Mobility
<b>Define an Occoquan Trail Town Vision</b>	-	Low	Short	Circulation and Mobility
<b>Town Council Passes a Resolution Recognizing the Community Values its Trails</b>	-	Low	Short	Circulation and Mobility
<b>Enhance Entrance to Tanyard Hill Park</b>	\$250	Medium	Short	Circulation and Mobility
<b>Coordinate Tanyard Hill Park Maintenance Plan with Volunteer Entities</b>	-	Medium	Near	Circulation and Mobility
<b>Improve Trail Signage</b>	\$3,000	Medium	Near	Circulation and Mobility
<b>Present a Yearly Progress Update at the NVRC Trails Summit</b>	-	Low	Near	Circulation and Mobility, Regional Coordination

# Parking and Transportation – Increasing Walkability, Accessibility, and Connectivity

## *Summary:*

With a downtown attractive to pedestrian traffic, friendly neighboring attractions and private businesses, and the commercial incentives to enhance parking and transportation within and without Town, Occoquan has many creative opportunities to improve accessibility to its attractions.

## *Goals:*

1. Increase pedestrian safety and navigability in Town with a Town map brochure, an online interactive map, targeted traffic calming measures, and standardized signage.
2. Increase multi-modal transportation alternatives with an OmniRide connection, prominent bike racks, electric bike services, and a water taxi.
3. Increase parking options in Town by incentivizing private-parking owners to allow paid parking in their unused spots and seeking additional parking outside of Town.
4. Increase connections to existing and future regional developments and attractions by pursuing synergistic events with Occoquan Regional Park and the Workhouse Arts Center.

## *First Priority Action Items:*

1. **Evaluate an Occoquan-based OmniRide Bus Stop:** The Town should research establishing an Occoquan connection for the OmniRide bus service. Occoquan is an ideal stop for OmniRide, given the number of local visitors who encounter very limited parking, particularly during weekends. In addition, the Prince William Community Energy and Sustainability Master Plan calls for upgrading public transportation infrastructure. Currently, OmniRide’s Lakeridge-Woodbridge and Woodbridge-Washington DC routes completely bypass Occoquan, a fairly high-density residential area, and a concentrated shopping locale. The closest bus stop is at the 123/Old Bridge commuter lot and pedestrian options to and from the stop are very unpleasant. Additionally, the Town should research either an OmniRide bus route or shuttle service connecting Occoquan to the Woodbridge Train Station to encourage visitors from outside the area.
2. **Standardize Parking Signage:** To better advertise existing Town parking lots, the universal “P” for parking sign should replace public parking signs to conform with visitor expectations.
3. **Apply for the League of American Bicyclists "Bicycle Friendly Community" Status (deadline June 5, 2024):** This will be a draft application and will likely be rejected this year, but the exercise of filling out the application and receiving feedback will inform the Town of what specific actions it can take to attract and promote cycling in Occoquan. The application from this year can then be revised and re-submitted each year to track progress.

## *Second Priority Action Items:*

1. **Enhance Biking Infrastructure and Awareness:** To increase driver awareness of cyclists and encourage more cycling in town, the Town should pursue the following:

- **Apply Annually for the League of American Bicyclists "Bicycle Friendly Community" Status:** Process will inform the Town of what specific actions it can take to promote cycling in Occoquan and track progress on those actions.
  - **Town Bike Rack Improvements/Signage:** The Town should better advertise the bike racks with signage or move them to more prominent locations. Also, the Town should invest in bike repair stations.
- 2. Enhance Pedestrian Connections to Occoquan Regional Park, Workhouse Arts Center and Other Regional Attractions and Developments:** To better connect with neighboring attractions like the Workhouse Arts Center, Occoquan Regional Park, and future Fairfax Peaks facility, the Town should engage in the following activities:
- **Advocate for a Trail Under the 123 Bridge in Fairfax County:** A trail from Old Ox Road that goes down along the hill beside the 123 Bridge, under the bridge, and into Occoquan Regional Park will connect Occoquan to that attraction.
  - **Pursue Diverse Mobility Connections to Local Attractions:** this includes promoting local electric bike rentals, shuttle services, and local water taxi services that would connect communities on the Occoquan River.
- 3. Evaluate and Advocate for Parking Outside of Town:**
- **Evaluate Parking Opportunities on Fairfax County Side of River:** The Town should talk with Vulcan, Occoquan Regional, and other property owners about using sites, such as the service road parallel to 123, for parking.
- 4. Continue Targeted Traffic-Calming Measures:** The Town should pursue targeted traffic-calming measures at the intersection of Mill and Washington streets, and Center Street in the mornings to address cut-through traffic running stop signs and endangering pedestrians. Additionally, the Town should continue to seek traffic-calming measures, such as additional crosswalks and pedestrian safety signage on Washington Street.

*Items for Town Council Approval/Budget Consideration:*

Recommendations	Cost Estimate	Staff Effort (Low, Medium, High)	Timeline (Short, Near, and Long-term)	Comp Plan Alignment
Evaluate an Occoquan-based OmniRide Bus Stop	TBD	High	Near	Circulation and Mobility; Regional Coordination
Standardize Parking Signage	\$300	Low	Short	Circulation and Mobility
Apply for the League of American Bicyclists "Bicycle Friendly Community" Status	\$50	Low	Short	Circulation and Mobility

# Green Improvements - Protecting the Ecological and Public Health of the Town

## *Summary:*

Occoquan's vision is to create, and be widely recognized as, a sustainable and vibrant green town, where eco-friendly practices harmonize with the tranquil setting of our town. We aspire to cultivate a community that values environmental stewardship, embraces renewable energy, promotes green spaces, and encourages a sense of responsibility for the well-being of our planet. Through education, innovation and collaboration with local residents, business and visitors, we aim to reimagine Occoquan as a town that thrives in balance with nature, inspiring residents to lead environmentally conscious lives for a healthier and greener future.

## *Goals:*

1. Create and expand green spaces as a means of improving stormwater runoff as well as to improve the environmental and social health of the Town and the Occoquan River.
2. Reduce water waste and solid waste as a means of lowering costs and reducing the environmental impact of the Town.
3. Encourage carbon-reducing activities as a means of promoting energy efficiency and reducing town carbon emissions.

## *First Priority Action Items:*

1. **Continue to implement a sustainable water quality monitoring program for the Occoquan River:** Implementing a sustainable all-volunteer, summertime water sampling program that publicizes sampling results weekly will burnish the Town's green credentials by demonstrating to river users such as boaters and fishers that the Town is monitoring the health of the river. Although the State Department of Environmental Quality (VA DEQ), Fairfax Water, and the PrinceWilliam County Soil and Conservation District tests the river for various safety parameters, the resulting data is not easily found. Volunteers can partner with the Potomac River Keepers Network to test the water weekly during the summer with results published each Friday on the internet and through a "Swim App."
2. **Protect Occoquan River from non-point source pollution and sediment through implementation of the Flood Protection Study:** Review the results of the current study and budget and implement recommended green stormwater BMPs that will reduce pollution and flood risks in the town.
3. **Use public engagement and demonstration to encourage reduction or elimination of one-time use utensils and boxes at Town eateries:** Providing encouragement and education to abandon one-time use plastic will add luster to Occoquan's well-deserved reputation as home to a lively retail and restaurant scene. The Town can provide resources like [Beyond Plastics'](#) "[Hold The Plastic, Please: A Restaurant's Guide to Reducing Plastic](#)" and [one-pager](#) on the Town's "[Doing Business in Occoquan](#)" webpage, sponsor informational events on reducing one-time use plastics, pass resolutions in support of reduction, and task the Planning Commission to explore ideas and network with local towns and vendors that are moving forward with non-ordinance related encouragement.
4. **Work with County to place a glass recycling bin next to the present recycling bin:** Town residents and others nearby must travel several miles to recycle glass. Locating a

glass recycling trailer would be a significant convenience for Town residents and residents of surrounding communities, burnish the Town's green credentials, and likely drive an increase of visitors to Town. A bin in Occoquan, near the current Single Stream Bin (which excludes glass) under the Route 123 Bridge, would be closer for all residents in Occoquan than any other current sites.

5. **Consult with Prince William County staff to see how Occoquan can contribute to the success of the Prince William County Community Energy and Sustainability Master Plan:** Many of the action items above are related to actions items in the County Plan. The Town should designate a lead to assess the plan and provide feedback to Town Council on how the Town can coordinate with the County on its High Priority Actions that significantly impact Occoquan (e.g. encouraging energy efficient building, improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, improving public transit, and multiple climate resiliency and stormwater actions).

*Second Priority Action Items:*

1. **Create educational programing on best environmental practices:**
  - **Create a Plaque or Award system to recognize good environmental actors in Town:** Historic districts are special areas in town that are highly visible and subject to various architectural restrictions. Rewarding those who implement various low energy solutions on or on their structures provides incentives and is a good look for the town.
  - **Plan and promote existing and future town facility improvements as demonstrations for various green practices (solar, rain collection system, lighting, low flush toilets, etc.):** Town Hall is a highly visible building in Town and would provide a good branding opportunity if cost effective green practices could be implemented and advertised.
2. **Establish food composting site (with PWC or a private contractor) to encourage residents and nonresidents to come into Town to recycle their food scraps:** Occoquan's high density of restaurants and residents is an ideal location for a food scrap recycling program, which would benefit the environment, increase visits into Town, and burnish the Town's green credentials. The Town should explore centralized drop-off locations and curbside pickup programs for collecting composting.
3. **Continually revisit options for solar/LED bulbs for street lighting:** Experience with "green" options for lighting has been mixed; however, as technologies change and improve, there may be future possibilities for renewable energy source street lighting in Town. This is in-line with the Prince William County goals for renewable energy usage.
4. **Evaluate existing conditions and create a plan for tree management and increasing native species:** Focus on key areas with a high presence of invasive tree and plant species (e.g. Furnace Branch Park, Commerce Street shoulder) and create a plan, utilizing outside grant funding for proper tree management and the restoration of native species.

*Items for Town Council Approval/Budget Consideration:*

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Cost Estimate</b>	<b>Staff Effort (Low, Medium, High)</b>	<b>Timeline (Short, Near, and Long-term)</b>	<b>Comp Plan Alignment</b>
<b>Continue to implement a sustainable water quality monitoring program for the Occoquan River</b>	\$2,500	Low	Short	Environmental Stewardship
<b>Protect Occoquan River from non-point source pollution and sediment through implementation of the Flood Protection Study</b>	TBD	High	Long	Environmental Stewardship
<b>Use public engagement and demonstration to encourage reduction or elimination of one-time use utensils and boxes at Town eateries</b>	-	Medium	Near	Environmental Stewardship
<b>Work with County to place a glass recycling bin next to the present recycling bin</b>	TBD	Medium	Near	Environmental Stewardship
<b>Consult with Prince William County staff to see how Occoquan can contribute to the success of the Prince William County Community Energy and Sustainability Master Plan</b>	-	Low	Near	Environmental Stewardship

# Placemaking, Beautification, and Public Art – Fostering A Distinct Identity for Town

## *Summary:*

Placemaking and Beautification in Occoquan would focus on creating attractive, engaging public spaces that foster social interaction and community engagement. Projects can improve the quality of life for residents by creating spaces that are welcoming and enjoyable to use. Beautifully designed public spaces can increase civic pride, promote social connections, and provide a sense of place and belonging. Such programs can additionally boost economic development by creating attractive and engaging public spaces, Occoquan can attract more visitors and businesses, which can help stimulate economic growth.

A Public Arts Program is a key ingredient in Placemaking for Occoquan. Public art adds enormous value to the cultural, aesthetic, and economic vitality of the community. It is now a well-accepted principle of urban design that public art contributes to a community's identity, fosters community pride and a sense of belonging, and enhances the quality of life for its residents and visitors. Public art also highlights what is unique about the places where people live, work, and play.

Artists can bring innovation and creative insight that can strengthen Occoquan's competitiveness within a regional marketplace and that can build and sustain a vibrant economy and community. The Public Arts Program will strive to support local artists and other creatives within the area and encourage their role as a member of the community.

## *Goals:*

1. Increase Placemaking/ Beautification efforts through budgeted projects and volunteer programming.
2. Increase public art installations in the Town to one to two installations every two years.
3. Diversify the types of public art to include both temporary and permanent installations on public and private properties
4. Commission public art that responds to community goals and priorities by incorporating participatory measures into the planning and implementation processes.

## *First Priority Action Items:*

1. **Conduct public art surveys as needed to ensure community input, including on themes and locations:** Solicit feedback from Town residents using a survey to determine public arts preferences, placement locations, and other relevant factors.
2. **Fund and create public art program:** Leveraging budgeted funds as seed money for outside grants, create a public arts program with a work plan based off staff, community, and political bodies input that outlines the goals of the program, community preferences on art installations, future placements (private and public locations) over a number of years and other relevant information.
3. **Create a prioritized list of projects including plantings, lighting, and pocket parks:** Create an inventory of all locations in town where there are beautification challenges and opportunities, including improvements to lighting at River Mill Park, flower baskets on gaslights and the footbridge, the creation of pocket parks, and beautification of public buildings as appropriate. Develop a theme e.g. "Making Occoquan Beautiful" to

encompass many Placemaking/Beautification activities. Possibly create competition with awards and recognition for businesses, property owners of businesses, private homes/townhouses, and individuals.

4. **Increase Placemaking and Beautification Funding for Pilot Projects:** In the short term, reappropriate to or increase FY25 funding for the Historic District to support the implementation of a pilot of the project list, including flower baskets on gaslights and the footbridge. In the long term, the Town should assess the results of the pilot and consider dedicated funding for beautification efforts, utilizing all applicable grant opportunities, Public/Private partnerships, and individual donor funding options. Town may also want to contact local jurisdictions who are experienced and successful in funding such projects.
5. **Expand volunteer corps to include beautification for private and public properties:** Build off existing and future volunteer opportunity communication tools to develop most effective interaction methods. Create opportunities for beautification on both public and private properties by hosting volunteers for regular assignments, special volunteer events (like FOTO cleanups), and/or adopt a business programs.

*Items for Town Council Approval/Budget Consideration:*

Recommendations	Cost Estimate	Staff Effort (Low, Medium, High)	Timeline (Short, Near, and Long-term)	Comp Plan Alignment
<b>Conduct public art surveys as needed to ensure community input, including on themes and locations</b>	-	Low	Short	Community Character/Life
<b>Fund and create public art program</b>	\$2,500	Medium	Short	Community Character/Life
<b>Create a prioritized list of projects including plantings, lighting, and pocket park(s)</b>	-	Medium	Near	Community Character/Life
<b>Increase Placemaking and Beautification Funding for Pilot Projects</b>	\$1,200	Low	Short	Community Character/Life
<b>Expand volunteer corps to include beautification for private and public properties</b>	-	Medium	Near	Community Character/Life

# Business Support and Recruitment - Fostering Economic Development and Diversification

## *Summary:*

Economic development makes our community a better place to live and work by creating a more dynamic, robust, unique local business community that meets the wants and needs of residents and visitors alike. This can be accomplished by breaking down silos between the Town and local businesses in order to better understand and be able to meet the needs of local businesses; by leveraging historic assets as a means of boosting the Town's economic resources; and by recruiting businesses that further the strategic goals of the Town and meet the wants and needs of residents and visitors.

## *Goals:*

1. Encourage and recruit businesses that meet the needs and wants of residents and visitors
2. Increase business and tax revenues by attracting more visitors
3. Increase the resilience of the local economy by encouraging the diversification of business types
4. Improve the sustainability of existing businesses by improving business support

## *First Priority Action Items:*

1. **Encourage the preservation and commercial use of the Town's historic buildings and structures:** The town's numerous historic structures both offer opportunities for unique commercial uses and create the historic small-town charm of Occoquan that underlies its tourism-based economy. The Town should engage with property owners to identify opportunities to maintain, improve, and increase commercial uses for these historic properties.
2. **Evaluate the creation of a property owner to tenant matching system:** The Town should work to connect commercial property owners with prospective business owners interested in expanding their reach into Occoquan in order to maximize mutual benefit to the Town and both parties. The Town should explore options to create a notification system with current property owners and engage with the local business community to curate a list of prospective businesses.
3. **Initiate a listening campaign with the community to assess the Town's business needs:** Lead discussions with Visit Occoquan, business owners, and property to owners focused on the challenges to starting a business in Occoquan and the pros and cons of running one. Craft a business support plan based off those discussions.

## *Second Priority Action Items:*

1. **Create business recruitment and support programming:** Based off the results of the listening campaign, the Town should work with relevant stakeholders, such as Visit Occoquan, to create business support programming to help address the stated needs of the business community and attract outside businesses and organizations to the Town. Programming would consist of two types of events: trainings on specific areas of need for local businesses and informational talks that market the Town (for example, topics could include: The Merits of Doing Business in Occoquan, The Founding of Occoquan in

the 18th Century, The Role of Local Native Tribes, The Civil War & Occoquan, Hurricane Agnes, etc). Both would be available to the wider community and raise awareness of Occoquan. Town should partner with the Prince William Chamber of Commerce, hospitals, universities, and experts on specific areas of need to host events like guest speakers, panel discussions, luncheons, etc. at little to no cost to the Town.

*Items for Town Council Approval/Budget Consideration:*

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Cost Estimate</b>	<b>Staff Effort (Low, Medium, High)</b>	<b>Timeline (Short, Near, and Long-term)</b>	<b>Comp Plan Alignment</b>
<b>Encourage the preservation and commercial use of the Town's historic buildings and structures</b>	-	Low	Short	Economic Vitality/ Diversity
<b>Evaluate the creation of a property owner to tenant matching system</b>	-	High	Long	Economic Vitality/ Diversity
<b>Initiate a listening campaign with the community to assess the Town's business needs</b>	-	Medium	Near	Economic Vitality/ Diversity

## Cross-Cutting Recommendations

### Summary:

In the course of the strategic planning process a number of concepts repeated across the different work groups. Below are those action items relating to regional coordination and marketing.

### First Priority Action Items:

1. **Expand marketing efforts to include promoting the Town in the strategic planning areas:** Assign a lead to create and publish media via multiple mediums promoting the Towns revitalization efforts (highlighting ease of doing business, tourism, and events), green practices (building improvements, EV charging, tree city, etc.), trails and trail town status, public art and beautification. Possibly include the creation of an interactive map and /or "adventure map" of town trails and attractions. Assess the creation and inclusion of volunteer brand ambassadors into existing volunteer and marketing efforts.
2. **Re-engage with existing NOVA Arts and Cultural District stakeholders and other regional partners:** Meet with NOVA Arts and Cultural District counterparts in order to create a clear understanding of individual and group goals. Make sure that existing founding documents provide a clear and accurate reflection of those shared goals. Create a Plan of Action and hold regularly scheduled meetings that allow for short term progress and medium/long term successful collaboration. Focus particular attention on coordinating public arts programming, events, parking, and regional trail connections.

### Items for Town Council Approval/Budget Consideration:

Recommendations	Cost Estimate	Staff Effort (Low, Medium, High)	Timeline (Short, Near, and Long-term)	Comp Plan Alignment
Expand marketing efforts to include promoting the Town in the strategic planning areas	TBD	High	Near	-
Re-engage with existing NOVA Arts and Cultural District stakeholders and other regional partners	-	High	Long	Regional Coordination



# TOWN OF OCCOQUAN

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TOWN COUNCIL  
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Jenn Loges, Vice Mayor  
Cindy Fithian  
Eliot Perkins  
Nancy Freeborne Brinton  
Theo Daubresse

## MEMORANDUM

September 20, 2024

TO: Eliot Perkins  
Chair, Planning Commission

FROM: Earnest W. Porta, Jr., JD, PhD  
Mayor

RE: Requested Feedback on "Planning Commission Strategic Planning  
Recommendations to the Town Council, March 26, 2024"

In April of 2024, the Planning Commission for the town of Occoquan submitted to the Town Council a document entitled, *Planning Commission Strategic Planning Recommendations to the Town Council*, dated March 26, 2024. The introduction of the document noted that to "realize its goals, the Planning Commission will need the support of the Town Council and asks for its feedback, approval, and action on a number of items outlined in the report."

Traditionally, the Town Council would discuss the document with staff, and a council member on the Planning Commission would relay the council's response. However, given the substantial effort put into this document by the commission members, I proposed that a written response would be more appropriate to ensure the commission members know their work has been given the careful consideration it deserves. The council agreed and accepted my offer to draft and send the memo upon their review.

### **Introduction**

The Planning Commission's document spans fourteen pages, covering five key thematic areas. Each area includes a list of goals, priority action items, and items for the town council's approval or budget consideration. Some sections also provide cost estimates, staff effort assessments, timelines, and comments on alignment with the comprehensive plan. It's clear that a significant amount of work went into this report, and it offers useful insights for the Town Council's future consideration.

At the heart of the document are the five thematic areas:

- Leveraging the Natural Resources of the Town (Trail Town)
- Increasing Walkability, Connectivity, and Accessibility (Parking and Transportation)
- Protecting the Ecological and Public Health of the Town (Green Improvements)
- Fostering a Distinct Identity for the Town (Placemaking and Beautification/Public Arts)
- Fostering Economic Development and Diversification (Business Support and Recruitment)

Some recommendations align with the town's FY 2025 budget, others align with longer-term strategic objectives, and a few, while desirable, may not be feasible due to competing priorities and budgetary constraints. Although detailed feedback for each area could be provided, there are a few overarching issues that, if addressed, could significantly enhance the document's value to both the town staff and the council. We suggest that the Planning Commission consider these points, revise the report accordingly, and submit it as part of their annual report due in December. This approach will not only strengthen the report's impact but also align the recommendations with the town's budget and operational planning calendar.

### **Clarity of Purpose**

The title of the document, "Planning Commission Strategic Planning Recommendations to the Town Council," suggests that it serves as a set of recommendations for the strategic framework the council adopts and revises annually. However, the introduction of the document implies that it could also function as a strategic plan for the Planning Commission's own activities.

The role of local planning commissions, as outlined in the Code of Virginia and the town code, is primarily advisory, focused on promoting orderly development of the locality and its environs. As strategic planning is somewhat beyond the traditional scope of a planning commission, clarity on the intended purpose of this document would enhance its utility. Is it meant to complement or respond to the council's strategic guidelines, preview future recommendations for the town's Comprehensive Plan update, or serve as an adjunct to the Planning Commission annual report due in December? A clear articulation of the document's purpose would help align expectations and ensure it serves its intended role effectively.

### **Enhanced Due Diligence**

While the report reflects a significant amount of effort, its overall utility could be further enhanced through additional due diligence in some areas. For example, in the area of transportation, public transit alternatives like OmniRide have been considered for Occoquan in the past. Transportation professionals, however, have consistently noted that there are already a number of existing stops close to Occoquan and that their existence, combined with other factors, make the town less suitable for a public transit stop of its own. These other factors include potential delays to existing routes that would result from using town streets, and the absence of a critical mass of town and county residents who would regularly use such a service to leave or access the town.

Similarly, the town's previous experiences with beautification efforts, such as hanging baskets on gaslights, have highlighted the challenges of sustaining such programs with limited staff and volunteer resources. In past attempts, for example, the demands of watering during the summer proved overwhelming for both staff and volunteers, leading to the unfortunate cancellation of these programs when flowers began to deteriorate. There were also concerns regarding the height of gaslights. Therefore, any recommendations to reinstitute these initiatives would benefit from thorough due diligence, including detailed calculations of time and cost. For example, an estimate for watering 40 gaslights at five minutes each results in approximately 200 minutes of staff time, not accounting for additional factors like traffic or water truck preparation. Such back-of-the-envelope calculations suggest a program cost ranging from \$10,000 to \$20,000 over a few months.

It's also possible that the plan assumes volunteer participation to mitigate costs or reduce staff workload. However, it's important to consider the town's existing reliance on volunteers and the mixed results of recent initiatives. In some cases, volunteer support has not materialized as expected, leading to the abandonment of projects, while others have become overly dependent on a small group of volunteers, raising sustainability concerns. Given these experiences, additional due diligence in this area would be particularly valuable, helping to ensure that recommendations are both realistic and achievable.

### **Consistency Among Recommendations**

The document would also benefit from ensuring internal consistency among the recommendations. Given the town's limited geographic footprint, proposals for additional green space, parking, and a composting facility may conflict with one another. Prioritizing these recommendations or clarifying their implications for zoning or property acquisition would enhance the document's coherence. Moreover, aligning environmental goals with practical considerations, such as the sustainability of watering practices for beautification efforts, would prevent conflicting messages within the report.

### **Timing**

Last, aligning the document with the town's planning cycle would significantly improve its impact. Submitting such a report in April is too late for meaningful integration into the fiscal year's budget and operational plans. Instead, incorporating it into the Planning Commission's annual December report would provide ample time for staff and the Town Council to evaluate the recommendations thoroughly. This timing would also allow for necessary consultations and adjustments based on the town's priorities.

### **Conclusion: Town Council Recommendation**

As mentioned at the outset, the Planning Commission's document is a product of considerable

effort and provides useful insights for future town planning. To maximize its effectiveness, we recommend addressing the four areas discussed: (1) Clarity of Purpose, (2) Enhanced Due Diligence, (3) Consistency Among Recommendations, and (4) Timing. Revising the report to reflect these considerations and submitting it as part of the Planning Commission's annual report in December would allow the Town Council to incorporate the recommendations into the budget and operational plans in a timely and informed manner. Additionally, the council member on the Planning Commission can facilitate communication, ensuring that the commission stays informed about the status of various initiatives and can adjust its recommendations accordingly.

If there are specific initiatives that require immediate or near-term attention before December or the next fiscal year, the council member on the Planning Commission can bring those to the Town Council for funding consideration, for council authorization for use of staff resources, etc., on an ad hoc basis. Following the submission of the Planning Commission's annual report, the council member on the Commission will be charged with providing regular updates to the Planning Commission on the progress and incorporation of its recommendations.

Once again, the council appreciates the great deal of work put into the draft report, which as written already provides useful information to the Town Council. We look forward to helping implement many, if not all, of the recommendations contained in the revised report submitted in December.