



TOWN OF OCCOQUAN

Circa 1734 | Chartered 1804 | Incorporated 1874

314 Mill Street
PO BOX 195
Occoquan, VA 22125
(703) 491-1918
occoquanva.gov
info@occoquanva.gov

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

February 25, 2025 | 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. **Elections**
 - a. Nominations and the Election of Officers for Calendar Year 2025
4. **Approval of Minutes**
 - a. January 28, 2025 Meeting Minutes
5. **Reports**
 - a. Town Council Report
 - b. Deputy Town Manager Report
 - c. Architectural Review Board Report
6. **Action Items**
 - a. Request to Consider Zoning Text Amendment on Shortened Appeal Periods and Set Public Hearing Date
 - b. Request to Approve and Submit Revised Planning Recommendations to Town Council
7. **Discussion Items**
 - a. Planning Commission Priorities Update
 - i. The Mill at Occoquan
 - ii. Occoquan Riverwalk
 - iii. Riverside Station (Formerly North Woodbridge Town Center)
 - iv. Alpine X
 - v. The Townes at Occoquan (Formerly Destination Place)
 - b. Bird Sanctuary Discussion
8. **Adjournment**

Eliot Perkins
Chair, Planning Commission



| | |
|--|--|
| 3. Election of Officers | Meeting Date: February 25, 2025 |
| 3A: Nominations and the Election of Officers for Calendar Year 2025 | |

Attachments: a. N/A

Submitted by: Matt Whitmoyer
Deputy Town Manager

Explanation and Summary:

This item is for the nomination and election of officers for the Planning Commission, pursuant to § 33.06(H) of the Town Code.

Each year, at the January meeting, the Commission must select a chairperson, vice-chairperson, and secretary, who serve for a 12-month terms of office and are eligible for re-election.

Proposed/Suggested Motion:

"I would like to nominate: [NAME] for [OFFICE]." Follow nomination and roll call process as outlined in Chair's agenda.

OR

Other action the Planning Commission deems appropriate.

| | |
|---|--|
| 4. Approval of Minutes | Meeting Date: February 25, 2025 |
| 4A: January 28, 2025 Meeting Minutes | |

Attachments: a. January 28, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Submitted by: Matt Whitmoyer
Deputy Town Manager

Explanation and Summary:

This is a request to approve the meeting minutes from January 28, 2025 Meeting Minutes for the Planning Commission Meeting.

Proposed/Suggested Motion:

"I move to approve the meeting minutes 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: 2025-01-28

MEETING TIME: 6:30 PM

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

Town Staff: Adam Linn, Town Manager; Matt Whitmoyer, Deputy Town Manager

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm

2. Citizen Comments

Samantha Sparks, resident, expressed her concern regarding light pollution impact on wildlife in Town, and referenced specific Town ordinances that address light pollution. She asked that the Commission consider communicating about the sources of light pollution (for example, back porch lights) as well as possible enforcement measures.

3. Approval of Minutes

- a. September 24, 2024 Meeting Minutes
- b. October 22, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Love moved to approve the September 24, 2024 and October 22, 2024 Planning Commission minutes. Ralph Newell seconded. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

4. Reports

- a. Town Council Report

None

- b. Deputy Town Manager Report

Mr. Whitmoyer reported that:

- a) Budget season has started for FY2026
- b) The Riverwalk Transportation Alternatives Program grant application will be submitted to the Virginia Department of Transportation. Chair Perkins noted that recent changes at VDOT may call into question the ability of the Riverwalk project to be considered a transportation alternative.
- c) The Town's application for the Charging and Fueling Infrastructure grant award was denied.

Chair Perkins asked Town staff to include the Mill at Occoquan and the Riverwalk to be added to future Planning Commission agendas.

Chair Perkins noted that the size of the Townes of Occoquan will have a significant impact on the surrounding area.

Mr. Whitmoyer noted that the developer of the Mill at Occoquan will need to apply for a County permit to demolish all of the structures at once (rather than in two separate demolition events as originally planned).

b. Architectural Review Board Report

None

5. Action Items

a. Request to Approve and Submit Annual Report to Town Council

Commissioner Kisling moved to approve and submit the 2024 Annual Report to the Town Council. Commissioner Love seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Request to Approve and Submit Revised Strategic Planning Recommendations to Town Council

Action was tabled to the February 25, 2025 meeting.

Chair Perkins led a discussion on the draft Strategic Planning Recommendations, including:

- a) how to respond to the Mayor's September 20, 2024 memo entitled "Requested Feedback on "Planning Commission Recommendations to the Town Council, March 26, 2024.""
- b) further editing of the recommendations to reflect which recommendations are already being undertaken, which recommendations require Town Council approval, and which recommendations are likely not feasible in the foreseeable future.
- c) the extent to which additional due diligence is required (either before or after Town Council approval) for the recommendations that require financial or staff/volunteer time.

6. Discussion Items

a. Planning Commission Priorities Update

- i. Riverside Station (Formerly North Woodbridge Town Center)
- ii. Alpine X
- iii. The Townes at Occoquan (Formerly Destination Place)

No discussion

7. 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

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 5. Reports | Meeting Date: February 25, 2025 |
| 5B: Deputy Town Manager Report | |

Attachments: a. None

Submitted by: Matt Whitmoyer
Deputy Town Manager

Explanation and Summary:

This is a report by the Deputy Town Manager on matters occurring in the past months that may be of relevance to the Planning Commission. The summary of items is below.

1. Joint Public Hearing and Meeting with Town Council – April 15th, 2025
2. Glass Recycling
3. Title IX Code Updates
4. Cigarette Sales Tax
5. 2025 Events Calendar
6. 2025 Landscaping Plan



| | |
|---|--|
| 6. Action Items | Meeting Date: February 25, 2025 |
| 6A: Request to Consider Zoning Text Amendments on Shortened Appeal Periods and Set Public Hearing Date | |

Attachments: a. Resolution R-2025-04

Submitted by: Matt Whitmoyer
Management Fellow

Explanation and Summary:

During the February 4, 2025, meeting, the Town Council referred a zoning text amendment on shortening the appeal period for certain short-term recurring zoning offenses to the Planning Commission.

This is a request for the Planning Commission to review the attached resolution, make any recommendations on a draft ordinance, and set a public hearing date for public comment prior to Commission action on the draft ordinance.

The objective of the amendments is to provide for more efficient and timely enforcement of certain zoning offenses that occur for non-permanent, short durations of time. These include offenses related to temporary sign permits, temporary trailers for sales, temporary seasonal displays, and home occupation certificate regulations restricting commercial vehicle parking.

Background

Per § 15.2-2286(A)(4) of the Code of Virginia, the Town Council may shorten the appeal period for certain recurring violations. Currently, the § 33.20 of the Town Code sets a 30-day appeal period for all zoning violations.

Staff Recommendation: Recommend the Planning Commission consider the resolution and request a joint public hearing to be set by Town Council.

Cost and Financing: N/A

Account Number: N/A

Proposed/Suggested Motion:

“I move to request that the Town Council set a joint public hearing date on the draft ordinance as presented.”

OR

“I move to direct the Town staff to revise the draft ordinance based upon the Commission’s recommendations. I further move to request that the Town Council set a joint public hearing date on the draft ordinance as revised by Town staff.”

OR

Other action the Commission deems appropriate.

**TOWN OF OCCOQUAN, VIRGINIA
RESOLUTION**

**INITIATION OF ZONING TEXT AMENDMENTS FOR REVISIONS TO SECTION
33.20, BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS, AND SECTION 157.014, TEMPORARY
TRAILER FOR SALES AND CONSTRUCTION OFFICE DURING
CONSTRUCTION, OF THE TOWN CODE TO PROVIDE FOR A SHORTENED
APPEAL PERIOD**

WHEREAS, the Occoquan Town Council wishes to initiate zoning text amendments to adopt revisions to the Town Zoning Code decisions regarding temporary sign permits, temporary trailer for sales, temporary seasonal displays, and home occupation certificate regulations restricting commercial vehicle parking; and

WHEREAS, the Town Council finds that public necessity, convenience, general welfare, and good zoning practice requires amending the Town Zoning Code to shorten the appeal period for certain short-term recurring zoning offenses; and

WHEREAS, by authority granted in §15.2-2286(A)(4) of the Code of Virginia, the Town Council may shorten the appeal period for certain recurring violations; and

WHEREAS, by authority granted in §15.2-2286(A)(7) of the Code of Virginia, the Town Council may amend, supplement, or change the zoning regulations; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Code of Virginia § 15.2-2286(A)(7)(i) and Town Code § 157.260 (B) (2), such amendment may be initiated by resolution of the Town Council, and

WHEREAS, pursuant to §15.2-2285(B), no zoning ordinance shall be amended or reenacted unless the governing body has referred it to its planning commission for its recommendations; and

WHEREAS, the proposed Amendments are attached hereto; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Occoquan Town Council does hereby initiate a zoning text amendment to amend the Town's Board of Zoning Appeal ordinance in Chapter 33, Article 33.20, and Chapter 157, Article 157.014, regarding Temporary Trailer for Sales and Construction Office During Construction; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Occoquan Town Council does hereby refer the proposed amendments to the Planning Commission for its recommendations; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the clerk is directed to advertise a joint public hearing of the Town Council and Planning Commission on the proposed amendment in accordance with the requirements of § 15.2-2204 of the Code of Virginia.

Adopted by the Town Council of the Town of Occoquan, Virginia this 4th day of February, 2025.

MOTION:

**DATE: February 4, 2025
Town Council Meeting**

SECOND:

Votes

Ayes:

Nays:

Absent from Vote:

Absent from Meeting:

BY ORDER OF THE TOWN COUNCIL

Attested:

Earnest W. Porta, Jr., Mayor

Philip Auville, Town Clerk

ORDINANCE # O-2025-XX

AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND SECTION 33.20, BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS, AND SECTION 157.014, TEMPORARY TRAILER FOR SALES AND CONSTRUCTION OFFICE DURING CONSTRUCTION, OF THE TOWN CODE TO PROVIDE FOR A SHORTENED APPEAL PERIOD

WHEREAS, the Town Council initiated a zoning text amendment to shorten the appeal period for certain short-term zoning offenses by Resolution R-2025-04; and

WHEREAS, by authority granted in §15.2-2286(A)(7) of the Code of Virginia, the Town Council may in such cases amend, supplement, or change the zoning regulations, and

WHEREAS, the Town Planning Commission and Town Council have advertised and held a joint public hearing on the proposed amendment to the Town zoning ordinance; and

WHEREAS, after receiving public input and the recommendation of the Planning Commission, the Town Council desires to amend the zoning ordinance to shorten the appeal period for certain short-term zoning offenses, in order to accomplish the objectives of Virginia Code § 15.2-2200 and serve the public health, safety and welfare.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED by the Council for the Town of Occoquan, Virginia meeting in regular session this ____ day of _____, 2025:

1. That the Town Council hereby amends the Town Code as presented in the attached; and
2. That this ordinance is effective upon passage.

BY ORDER OF THE TOWN COUNCIL

Meeting Date: _____, 2025
Town Council Meeting
Ord No. O-2025-XX

RE: AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND SECTION 33.20, BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS, AND SECTION 157.014, TEMPORARY TRAILER FOR SALES AND CONSTRUCTION OFFICE DURING CONSTRUCTION, OF THE TOWN CODE TO PROVIDE FOR A SHORTENED APPEAL PERIOD

MOTION:
SECOND:
ACTION:

Votes:
Ayes:
Nays:

Absent from Vote:
Absent from Meeting:

CERTIFIED COPY _____
Town Clerk

§ 33.30 APPEALS TO BOARD.

(A) Generally. An appeal to the Board of Zoning Appeals may be taken by any person aggrieved or by any officer, department, board, or bureau of the town affected by any decision of the Zoning Administrator or from any order, requirement, decision, or determination made by any other administrative officer (a "Decision") in the administration or enforcement of VA Code §§ 15.2-2280 et seq., or Chapter 157 of this code. Except as provided for in subsection (A) (i) of this section, any Decision shall include a statement informing the recipient that he or she may have a right to appeal the notice of a zoning violation or a written order within 30 days in accordance with this section, and that the Decision shall be final and unappealable if not appealed within 30 days. The appeal period shall not commence until the statement is given.

- i. A notice of violation concerning a temporary trailer for sales and construction office during construction, temporary seasonal displays, or parking of a marked company vehicle in connection with a home occupancy certificate shall state that the appeal must be brought to the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) within ten (10) days from the date of the decision.

(B) Application and fees. Any person aggrieved by a Decision of the Zoning Administrator may appeal to the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) by filing on the form provided, a notice of appeal with the Zoning Administrator and the Board of Zoning Appeals, which appeal shall specify the grounds of the appeal, together with the fees as established in the current fee schedule. For a notice of violation concerning temporary trailer for sales and construction office during construction under Town Code § 157.014; temporary seasonal displays under Town Code §§ 157.041 (A)(8), 157.061 (A) (7), 157.081 (A)(9), 157.101 (A)(4), or 157.121 (A)(21); or parking of a marked company vehicle in connection with a home occupancy certificate under Town Code § 157.010, the appeal must be filed within 10 days from the date of the notice of violation. . For all other Decisions, the appeal must be filed within 30 days from the date of the Decision. The application and accompanying maps, plans, and other documentation constituting the record upon which the action appealed from was taken shall be transmitted promptly to the Secretary of the Board, who shall place the matter on the docket. An appeal shall stay all proceedings in furtherance of the action appealed from unless the Zoning Administrator certifies to the Board that by reason of facts stated in the certificate a stay would in his or her opinion cause imminent peril to life or property, in which case proceedings shall not be stayed otherwise than by a restraining order granted by the Board or by a court of record, on application and on notice to the Zoning Administrator and for good cause shown.

(C) Notice and hearing required; Planning Commission recommendation. After entering the appeal on the docket, the Secretary of the Board shall advertise a public hearing, give written notice to the parties in interest, and request the Zoning Administrator to transmit a copy of the application and his or her staff report to the Planning Commission; the Planning Commission may send a written recommendation to the Board to appear as a party at the public hearing.

(D) Burden of proof. The applicant for a variance has the burden of proving that denial of a variance will result in unnecessary hardship, of proving that his or her hardship is due to Chapter 157 of this code itself, and of proving, to the satisfaction of the Board, requirements for a variance stipulated in the VA Code.

(E) Findings required. The Board shall fix a reasonable time for the hearing of an application or appeal, give public notice as well as due notice to the parties in interest, and make its decision within 90 days of the filing of the application or appeal. In exercising its powers, the Board may reverse or affirm, wholly or partly, or may modify an order, requirement, decision, or determination appealed from. The concurring vote of a majority of the membership of the Board shall be necessary to reverse any order, requirement, decision, or determination of an administrative officer or to decide in favor of the applicant on any matter upon which it is required to pass under Chapter 157 of this code or to effect any variance from Chapter 157 of this code. The decision of the Board must be based on the evidence adduced at a public hearing and must include findings of fact disclosing the evidence relied upon by the Board and otherwise state the business and grounds for its decision to assure that the provisions of the VA Code and this subchapter have been met.

(F) Board to issue order. Whenever the Board shall grant a variance, the Secretary of the Board shall cause an order to be issued evidencing the grant and furnish copies of the order to the applicant, to the Zoning Administrator, to the Town Clerk, and to such other parties as deemed necessary.

(G) Limitation on change. In no event shall a written order, requirement, decision, or determination made by the Zoning Administrator or other administrative officer be subject to change, modification, or reversal by any Zoning Administrator or other administrative officer after 60 days have elapsed from the date of the written order, requirement, decision, or determination where the person aggrieved has materially changed his or her position in good faith reliance on the action of the Zoning Administrator or other administrative officer unless it is proven that such written order, requirement, decision, or determination was obtained through malfeasance of the Zoning Administrator or other administrative officer or through fraud. The 60-day limitation period shall not apply in any case where, with the concurrence of the Town Attorney, modification is required to correct clerical or other nondiscretionary errors.

(1998 Code, § 2-281) (Ord. O-2023-15, passed 9-19-2023)

§ 157.014 TEMPORARY TRAILER FOR SALES AND CONSTRUCTION OFFICE DURING CONSTRUCTION.

(A) The Zoning Administrator shall issue a zoning permit for a temporary trailer to be used for sales and/or construction purposes:

(1) During construction of a residential or mixed-use development; or

(2) During construction, renovation, or reconstruction of a primary permanent structure for commercial or residential uses, if the following criteria are met:

(a) For a trailer permitted under division (A)(1) above, there is an approved, valid final site plan or subdivision plat that remains under bond, for the site on which the temporary trailer will be located;

(b) For a trailer permitted under division (A)(2) above, there is a valid building permit in place;

(c) The applicant has submitted a sketch of the site identifying the location of the temporary trailer and construction plans. This sketch need not be sealed by an engineer but must show scale, north arrow, distance from the trailer to the nearest property lines, the location of at least two parking spaces, the hours of operation, and the location, type, and wattage of any temporary site lighting for the temporary trailer;

(d) The temporary trailer shall be subject to the minimum setbacks of the zoning district in which it is located;

(e) The temporary trailer shall be located within the boundary of the project in which lots or units are to be sold or rented;

(f) No sleeping accommodations shall be provided within the temporary trailer;

(g) The temporary trailer shall be securely attached and underpinned. Foundations for the office shall be screened from public view;

(h) Outdoor lighting meeting the standards set forth in §§ 157.285 through 157.288 of this chapter shall be provided for hours of operation after sunset or before sunrise;

(i) Each temporary trailer shall not exceed one story in height and 625 square feet of floor area;

(j) Sanitary facilities are connected to public water and sewer or have been approved by the health department. A copy of the health department approval must be submitted with the application;

(k) All temporary trailers located in the Old and Historic Occoquan District shall be exempted from the certificate of appropriateness requirement as set forth in §§ 157.175 through 157.182 of this chapter;

(I) Prior to issuance of any permit, the applicant shall execute a guarantee of removal after termination of the permit and the Zoning Administrator shall require a reasonable bond with surety, cash escrow, letter of credit, any combination thereof, or such other legal arrangement acceptable to the Town Attorney, to ensure that measures could be taken by the town at the applicant's expense should they fail, after proper notice, to remove the temporary trailer from the location or fail to take such other action to meet the aforementioned conditions. If the town takes such action upon such failure by the applicant, the locality may collect from the applicant for the difference should the amount of the reasonable cost of such action exceed the amount of the security held, if any. Within 60 days of the completion of the requirements of the permit conditions, such bond, cash escrow, letter of credit, or other legal arrangement, or the unexpended or unobligated portion thereof, shall be refunded to the applicant or terminated.

(B) The permit for a temporary trailer shall be for no more than 180 days, subject to a single renewal for up to 180 days, but in no circumstances may a single project have a temporary trailer for more than 360 days in any 24-month period. Upon the sale or rental of all marketed units on the property, the permit for the temporary trailer expires immediately. The Zoning Administrator may terminate the permit after giving 10 days notice of a violation of this section if the violation remains uncorrected upon expiration of the notice period. The holder of the permit may appeal the termination of the permit within 10 days to the Board of Zoning Appeals.

(C) Applicants shall apply for the permit with forms provided by the Zoning Administrator and pay the applicable fee as set by Town Council in the fee schedule. The Zoning Administrator shall grant or deny the permit within 30 days of application. If the Zoning Administrator grants the permit, the applicant shall keep and display the permit on the exterior of the temporary trailer until the trailer is removed from the site.

(D) The appeal period for a notice of violation under this Section is 10 days.

(Ord. O-2023-10, passed 6-6-2023)

| | |
|---|--|
| 6. Action Items | Meeting Date: February 25, 2025 |
| 6B: Request to Approve and Submit Revised Planning Recommendations to Town Council | |

Attachments:

- a. Draft Revised Planning Recommendations
- b. Town Council Response Memo
- c. Strategic Planning Recommendations Report (Previously Submitted to Town Council)

Submitted by: Matt Whitmoyer
Deputy Town Manager

Explanation and Summary:

This is a request to approve the revised strategic planning recommendations and submit them to the Town Council. The document includes the revised strategic planning recommendations, based on the Town Council’s feedback.

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.

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

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 will allow the Town Council to incorporate the recommendations into the budget in a timely and informed manner.

At its September 24, 2024 meeting, the Planning Commission reviewed Council’s response and the Chair instructed each Commissioner to create a priority list of 10 recommendations for discussion and revision of the report at the next Commission meeting. At its October 22, 2024 meeting, the Planning Commission reviewed the prioritized lists and discussed how to revise the recommendations. The Chair indicated he would redraft the recommendations to indicate the priorities and work with Town Staff on answering the questions from the Town Council’s response memo on the recommendations. At the January 28, 2025 meeting, the Commission reviewed the revised report, provided feedback, and tabled action on the recommendations until the February 25, 2025 meeting.

Proposed Motion:

“I move to approve the revised strategic planning recommendations as presented and submit them to the Town Council.”

OR

“I move to approve the revised strategic planning recommendations with the following revisions: [LIST OUT EACH REVISION] and submit them to the Town Council.”

OR

Other action the Commission deems appropriate.



Occoquan Planning Commission Planning Recommendations to Town Council

March 26, 2024

Revised: February 25, 2025

Occoquan Planning Commission

Eliot Perkins, Chair

Ralph Newell, Vice Chair

Don Wood, Secretary

Darryl Hawkins, Commissioner

Ann Kisling, Commissioner

Robert Love, Commissioner

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Trail Town Program - Leveraging the Natural Resources of the Town..... | 4 |
| Parking and Transportation - Increasing Walkability, Accessibility, and Connectivity..... | 7 |
| Green Improvements - Protecting the Ecological and Public Health of the Town..... | 9 |
| Placemaking, Beautification, and Public Art - Fostering A Distinct Identity for Town..... | 12 |
| Business Support and Recruitment - Fostering Economic Development and Diversification | 15 |
| Cross-Cutting Recommendations..... | 17 |
| Removed Priorities | 18 |

Introduction

Starting in Winter 2023, the Planning Commission, using the *Vision 2026 Comprehensive Plan* as a guide, engaged in a planning effort to formulate themes and corresponding recommendations for the Planning Commission's work over the next several years. The objective of this effort was to provide prioritized recommendations that either complement the council's strategic framework and/or that preview future recommendations for the 2026 Comprehensive Plan update.

As part of the creation and prioritization of the recommendations, the Planning Commission took several items into consideration: the alignment with Council's strategic framework, cost, town staffing requirements, volunteer requirements, and the 2026 Comprehensive Plan update. Due to the recognition that resources are finite both in terms of dollars and staff time, the Planning Commission has the willingness and enthusiasm to take on an active role as is deemed appropriate by Council.

After review of this report, the Planning Commission asks that the Town Council assign ownership on action items deemed viable to the Commission and/or Town staff as deemed appropriate. The Commission further asks the Town Council to consider inclusion of cost-incurring items into the Fiscal Year 2026 budget process.

Report Structure:

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 recommended action items for Town Council. 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. 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 Second Priority consists of longer-term items that are meant to preview future recommendations for the 2026 Comprehensive Plan update.

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 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. Earn designation as a Virginia Trail Town by working with the Commonwealth to define the standards for a Trail Town and create a designation program.
2. Cultivate and promote Occoquan’s identity as a Trail Town with historical markers, wayfinding signage, and local attractions to bring outdoors enthusiasts into Town.
3. 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.
4. Increase the value and accessibility of Tanyard Hill park as a local trail destination with trail connections to the Occoquan Greenway.

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 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. **Improve Trail Signage:**
 - **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.
 - **Post Signs for the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail:** As a signatory, Occoquan needs to honor its commitment to the PHNST memorandum of

understanding by placing signage for the trail at appropriate locations within Town. Representatives at NVRC recommend having NPS install the signs.

- 5. 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. Coordinate with the County on Trail Connections Between Tanyard Hill Park and Occoquan Greenway:** A limitation for Tanyard Hill Park is that it is somewhat inaccessible to Occoquan residents, with no dedicated parking lot or straightforward pedestrian connection from town. Connecting the park to the Occoquan Greenway will provide an accessible, safe route to residents. Town should continue to coordinate with the County to ensure the trail connections are built and maintained.
- 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.
- 4. Develop and Leverage Stakeholder Connections with Trail-related Organizations:** Connect with all applicable trail related organizations which could be advantageous in the furtherance of Occoquan as a successful Trail Town.

Items for Town Council Approval/Budget Consideration:

| Recommendations | Cost Estimate | Staff Effort (Low, Medium, High) | Timeline (Short, Near, and Long-term) | Comp Plan Alignment |
|---|---------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Assess Community Input on a Trail Town Program | - | Low | Short | Circulation and Mobility |
| Define an Occoquan Trail Town Vision | - | Medium | Short | Circulation and Mobility |
| Town Council Passes a Resolution Recognizing the Community Values its Trails | - | Low | Short | Circulation and Mobility |
| Improve Trail Signage | \$3,000 | Medium | Near | Circulation and Mobility |

| | | | | |
|---|---|-----|------|---|
| Present a Yearly Progress Update at the NVRC Trails Summit | - | 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, continued targeted traffic calming measures, and standardized signage.
2. Pursue multi-modal transportation alternatives with , prominent bike racks, electric bike services, shuttle, and a water taxi.
3. Increase connections to existing and future regional developments and attractions by pursuing synergistic events and relationships with Occoquan Regional Park, Riverside Station, The Townes at Occoquan, Alpine X/Fairfax Peak, and the Workhouse Arts Center.

First Priority Action Items:

1. **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.
2. **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.

Second Priority Action Items:

1. **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:
 - **Memorialize the Town’s Plans on and Continue to Advocate for a Trail Under the 123 Bridge in Fairfax County:** As the Town has started to advocate for this improvement, the Planning Commission wants to ensure the effort its properly memorialized in the Comprehensive Plan, or another document that the Town

Council deems appropriate, and offer its services in ensuring the trail comes to fruition. 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, driving more recreational and economic opportunities for town businesses and residents.

- **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.
2. **Evaluate and Advocate for Parking Outside of Town:** The Town should talk with Vulcan, Occoquan Regional Park, and other property owners about using sites, such as the service road parallel to Rt. 123, for parking.
 3. **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 |
|--|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Standardize Parking Signage | \$300 | Low | Short | Circulation and Mobility |
| Enhance Biking Infrastructure and Awareness | \$50/year; TBD for repair stations | Medium | Near | Circulation and Mobility |

Green Improvements – Protecting the Ecological and Public Health of the Town

Summary:

Occoquan has the opportunity 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 achieve those goals through thoughtful action.

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 anglers that the Town is monitoring the health of the river. Although the State Department of Environmental Quality (VA DEQ), Fairfax Water, and the Prince William 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. **Install Mussel Cage on Town Dock:** The Town should renew efforts to install a mussel cage on the town dock as a way to both improve the water quality of and education on the Occoquan River. Since 2023, the Town has been in continued discussions with the Potomac River Keepers Network to become a part of its *50 Million Mussel Project*, an initiative to restore 50 million native freshwater mussels to the Potomac River by 2030 as a critical next step towards improving (and maintaining) water quality in the Potomac. Funding for the mussel cage was adopted in the FY2024 Capital Improvements Program with plans to partially fund it via the 2024 RiverFest’s boat parade fees. However, the project was not completed due to a lack of donated funds.
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. 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.

Second Priority Action Items:

- 1. Create an Award system to recognize good environmental actors in Town:** The historic district is a special area in town that is highly visible and subject to various architectural restrictions. Rewarding those who take the extra time to implement various environmentally beneficial improvements on their properties is a good look for the town. To keep a sustainable level of effort, Town Council should consider annually or semi regularly recognizing, via resolution and social media, a business or resident that makes such environmental improvements to their property.
- 2. 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).

Items for Town Council Approval/Budget Consideration:

| Recommendations | Cost Estimate | Staff Effort (Low, Medium, High) | Timeline (Short, Near, and Long-term) | Comp Plan Alignment |
|---|---------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Continue to implement a sustainable water quality monitoring program for the Occoquan River | \$2,500 | Low | Short | Environmental Stewardship |
| Install Mussel Cage on Town Dock | \$6,500 | Medium | Short | Environmental Stewardship |
| Use public engagement and demonstration to encourage | - | Medium | Near | Environmental Stewardship |

| | | | | |
|---|---|--------|------|---------------------------|
| reduction or elimination of onetime use utensils and boxes at Town eateries | | | | |
| Evaluate existing conditions and create a plan for tree management and increasing native species | - | Medium | Long | 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. **Create and Fund 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. **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.

Secondary Action Items:

1. **Increase Placemaking and Beautification Funding for Pilot Projects:** For this to occur first there needs to be a priority placed on expanding the volunteer corps. Due to the volunteer efforts needed in this area it cannot happen without increased volunteer numbers. Once that has occurred a pilot project(s) should be undertaken. Town should then 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.

Items for Town Council Approval/Budget Consideration:

| Recommendations | Cost Estimate | Staff Effort (Low, Medium, High) | Timeline (Short, Near, and Long-term) | Comp Plan Alignment |
|---|------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Conduct public art surveys as needed to ensure community input, including on themes and locations | - | Low | Short | Community Character/Life |
| Fund and create public art program | \$2,500 per year | Medium | Short | Community Character/Life |
| Create a prioritized list of projects including plantings, lighting, pocket park(s) etc. | - | Medium | Near | Community Character/Life |

| | | | | |
|---|---------|--------|-------|--------------------------|
| Expand volunteer corps to include beautification for private and public properties | \$1,000 | Medium | Short | 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 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 business recruitment program:** As Town Council has revised its framework to include the evaluation of creating a business recruitment program, the Planning Commission would like to request that Town staff examine the following items in their evaluation: ad hoc reports to Town Council on key commercial vacancies, best practices for localities to recruit value adding businesses, insights from Visit Occoquan and the existing business community on attracting businesses to the town, how much staff time and funding should be dedicated, and what the goals and outcomes are for a potential program.
3. **Collaborate with Visit Occoquan to assess town business needs:** Work with Visit Occoquan to integrate priorities and questions from Town Council, Town Boards, and/or staff into Visit's existing programming that will help assess how Town can improve the business environment, including meetings and surveys.

Second Priority Action Items:

1. **Create business recruitment and support programming:** Based off the results of collaboration with Visit Occoquan, the Town should work with relevant stakeholders 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:

| Recommendations | Cost Estimate | Staff Effort (Low, Medium, High) | Timeline (Short, Near, and Long-term) | Comp Plan Alignment |
|--|----------------------|---|--|---------------------------------|
| Encourage the preservation and commercial use of the Town's historic buildings and structures | - | Low | Short | Economic Vitality/ Diversity |
| Evaluate the creation of a business recruitment program | - | High | Long | Economic Vitality/ Diversity |
| Collaborate with Visit Occoquan to assess town business needs | - | Medium | Near | Economic Vitality/ Diversity |

Cross-Cutting Recommendations

Summary:

In the course of the 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 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 planning areas | \$1,500 | Medium | Near | - |
| Re-engage with existing NOVA Arts and Cultural District stakeholders and other regional partners | - | High | Long | Regional Coordination |

Removed Priorities

The removed priorities include action items that have either been completed, are in progress, have been supplanted, or have been deemed infeasible due to multiple factors. Specific rationales for removal are included both for posterity and potential future reconsideration by Town Council and/or Planning Commission.

Trail Town Program

- 1. 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.
 - **Rationale:** Town advocating for inclusion of park in Prince William County system.
- 2. Coordinate Tanyard Hill Park Maintenance with Volunteers:** Set up a volunteer program for maintaining the trail in the park and connecting trails.
 - **Rationale:** Town advocating for inclusion of park in Prince William County system.

Parking and Transportation – Increasing Walkability, Accessibility, and Connectivity

- 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.
 - **Rationale:** Town Council has deemed infeasible based on prior discussions with OmniRide.
- 2. 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.
 - **Rationale:** Deadline has passed. Item worked into biking infrastructure item.

Green Improvements – Protecting the Ecological and Public Health of the Town

1. **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.
 - **Rationale:** Report reviewed by staff and recommendations not deemed feasible at this time or covered by EPA grant currently in planning phase.
2. **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.
 - **Rationale:** Most changes already made, and effort deemed higher than benefit.
3. **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.
 - **Rationale:** Any composting program will only be feasible if part of potential County initiative.
4. **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.
 - **Rationale:** Any large scale solar applications for lighting have proven infeasible. Deemed appropriately monitored by staff.

Business Support and Recruitment

1. **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.
 - **Rationale:** Effort deemed greater than benefit. Revised into new item that will provide same aim with easier level of effort.
2. **Initiate a listening campaign with the community to assess the Town's business needs:** Lead discussions with Visit Occoquan, business owners, and property 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.
 - **Rationale:** Replaced with revised item that will avoid redundancy and achieve same aim by working with Visit Occoquan



TOWN OF OCCOQUAN

Circa 1734 • Chartered 1804 • Incorporated 1874
314 Mill Street • PO Box 195 • Occoquan, Virginia 22125
(703) 491-1918 • Fax (571) 398-5016 • info@occoquanva.gov
www.occoquanva.gov

TOWN COUNCIL
Earnie W. Porta, Jr., Mayor
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.



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

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 3 |
| Trail Town Program - Leveraging the Natural Resources of the Town | 4 |
| Parking and Transportation - Increasing Walkability, Accessibility, and Connectivity | 6 |
| Green Improvements - Protecting the Ecological and Public Health of the Town | 8 |
| Placemaking, Beautification, and Public Art - Fostering A Distinct Identity for Town | 11 |
| Business Support and Recruitment - Fostering Economic Development and Diversification | 13 |
| Cross-Cutting Recommendations | 15 |

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:**
 - **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.
 - **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 |
|---|---------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Assess Community Input on a Trail Town Program | - | Low | Short | Circulation and Mobility |
| Define an Occoquan Trail Town Vision | - | Low | Short | Circulation and Mobility |
| Town Council Passes a Resolution Recognizing the Community Values its Trails | - | Low | Short | Circulation and Mobility |
| Enhance Entrance to Tanyard Hill Park | \$250 | Medium | Short | Circulation and Mobility |
| Coordinate Tanyard Hill Park Maintenance Plan with Volunteer Entities | - | Medium | Near | Circulation and Mobility |
| Improve Trail Signage | \$3,000 | Medium | Near | Circulation and Mobility |
| Present a Yearly Progress Update at the NVRC Trails Summit | - | 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:

| Recommendations | Cost Estimate | Staff Effort (Low, Medium, High) | Timeline (Short, Near, and Long-term) | Comp Plan Alignment |
|---|---------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Continue to implement a sustainable water quality monitoring program for the Occoquan River | \$2,500 | Low | Short | Environmental Stewardship |
| Protect Occoquan River from non-point source pollution and sediment through implementation of the Flood Protection Study | TBD | High | Long | Environmental Stewardship |
| Use public engagement and demonstration to encourage reduction or elimination of one-time use utensils and boxes at Town eateries | - | Medium | Near | Environmental Stewardship |
| Work with County to place a glass recycling bin next to the present recycling bin | TBD | Medium | Near | Environmental Stewardship |
| 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 | - | 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 |
|--|---------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Conduct public art surveys as needed to ensure community input, including on themes and locations | - | Low | Short | Community Character/Life |
| Fund and create public art program | \$2,500 | Medium | Short | Community Character/Life |
| Create a prioritized list of projects including plantings, lighting, and pocket park(s) | - | Medium | Near | Community Character/Life |
| Increase Placemaking and Beautification Funding for Pilot Projects | \$1,200 | Low | Short | Community Character/Life |
| Expand volunteer corps to include beautification for private and public properties | - | 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:

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

| | |
|--|--|
| 7. Discussion Items | Meeting Date: February 25, 2025 |
| 7A. Planning Commission Priorities Update | |

Attachments: a. None

Submitted by: Matt Whitmoyer
Deputy Town Manager

Explanation and Summary:

This is a discussion item to review regional planning news and development projects of importance to the Planning Commission.

Priorities include:

- The Mill at Occoquan
- Occoquan Riverwalk Expansion
- Riverside Station (Formerly North Woodbridge Town Center)
- Alpine X
- The Townes of Occoquan (Formerly Destination Place)

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 7. Discussion Items | Meeting Date: February 25, 2025 |
| 7B. Bird Sanctuary Discussion | |

Attachments: a. Bird Sanctuary Memo from Ryan Somma
 b. Outdoor Lighting Proposal from Samantha Spark

Submitted by: Matt Whitmoyer
 Deputy Town Manager

Explanation and Summary:

This is a discussion item to review the Town’s Bird Sanctuary Status.

Attached is a memo from resident Ryan Somma, submitted to staff, Chair Perkins, and Commissioner Wood, outlining his assessment of the situation and his recommendations.

This item was requested by Commissioner Wood.

Background:

The Town currently has Bird Sanctuary status through VDOT that was initiated by a past resolution of the Town Council. The current whereabouts of said resolution are unknown. Bird Sanctuary signage is posted at every road entrance into town.

At the January 28, 2025 meeting, resident Samantha Spark reported a concern to the Planning Commission about outdoor lighting in the town and its effects on wildlife, particularly birds. Her proposal to the Planning Commission from that meeting is attached as well for context.

Occoquan Bird Sanctuary Findings

Introduction

After Citizen Time comments at the Planning Commission citing Occoquan's status as a Bird Sanctuary, the question came up: What do the Bird Sanctuary signs at the Town borders mean? It appears that this status has been taken for granted by the Town and needs to be clearly defined to align with the Town's concern for environmental stewardship and as a tourist destination for natural wonders.

Findings

The Code of Virginia, 24VAC30-151-570. Miscellaneous signs section states that Bird Sanctuary signs are provided by VDOT to municipalities that pass a resolution to that effect:

Bird sanctuary. Upon receipt of a request from a town or city, VDOT will fabricate and erect these signs, at the expense of the municipality, at the corporate limits of the town or city under the municipality name sign as shown in the Virginia Supplement to the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (see 24VAC30-151-760). *In order for a municipality to be designated as a bird sanctuary, the municipality must pass a resolution to that effect.* The municipality shall be responsible for maintenance of bird sanctuary signs. (emphasis added)

No such resolution can be found online. There is no reference to Occoquan as a Bird Sanctuary in the Town Code and it is not listed in ordinances passed between 1998-2014 nor 2014-2017. Matt Whitmoyer said the resolution must only exist in the Town's paper archives. There is no online repository of what Virginia municipalities share this designation, and it appears to be entirely at the discretion of the localities to define and maintain this status.

According to Town resident Anne Sawyer, the resolution was adopted circa the 1980s. As fun bit of trivia, she said it was controversial at the time because the Town was overrun with stray cats and citizens were upset that the Bird Sanctuary was being used to justify a Town policy of neutering-and-releasing the cats, which were believed to be keeping down the Town's rat population. She recommended speaking with fellow resident Mary Ann Phelps for additional oral history.

Numerous references to the town as a Bird Sanctuary are found online. The Comprehensive Plan (CP) references the Bird Sanctuary in the chapter "Environmental Stewardship" subheading "Trees and Landscaping," where it states, "[The Town] is a designated Bird Sanctuary requiring particular attention to preserving shoreline wooded areas." The Visit Occoquan website

highlights the Town as a Bird Sanctuary, and the Virginia Department of Wildlife Services (DWR) refers to the Town as a Bird Sanctuary in recommending it to potential visitors:

The entire Town of Occoquan, located along the Occoquan River, has been designated as a bird sanctuary. For a quiet and scenic view of the river, with access to riparian woodlands, visitors can cross the footbridge near the water treatment facility, turn right and walk along the quiet road. Walnut, sycamore, princess tree, and tulip poplar trees shade this roadway. An understory of grapevine, poison ivy, and greenbriar provide food and cover for songbirds. Roadside plants such as Queen Anne's lace, passionflower, and trumpet vine provide food for ruby-throated hummingbird and a variety of butterflies. The bridge allows a good opportunity to look for the locally common mallard, Canada goose, and belted kingfisher. Additional waterfowl occur during winter.

While the Town does not appear to define what it means for it to be a Bird Sanctuary, other municipalities in Virginia do incorporate this status into their town codes. For example, Independence, VA's Town Code section § 90.01 TOWN DESIGNATED AS BIRD SANCTUARY; KILLING OR INJURING BIRDS, defines the following regarding their Bird Sanctuary (note how invasive species are explicitly excluded from protections):

(A) The entire area within the corporate limits of the town shall be a bird sanctuary for the protection of all birds, *except starlings, black birds, pigeons and English sparrows*. Signs stating that the town is a bird sanctuary may be erected in the town, provided that the types of signs and locations thereof are first approved by the Town Council.
(emphasis added)

(B) It shall be unlawful for any person within the town to intentionally kill or injure any bird or destroy or injure the nests or eggs of any bird.

Recommendations

Occoquan's status as a Bird Sanctuary appears to be a valuable quality for visitors and an important part of the Town's identity. The Planning Commission should update the Comprehensive Plan to clearly define what it means for Occoquan to be a Bird Sanctuary. The Town Council would then review the updated plan and implement the appropriate changes to the Town Code.

These are just a few potential considerations in defining what it means for Occoquan to be a Bird Sanctuary:

- Locate the original Town resolution declaring Occoquan a Bird Sanctuary to learn about the historical context and original intent.
- The Town boundary extends across the Occoquan River, which is a key environment for waterfowl and includes the forested areas that are too steep for development. Highlighting these natural sanctuaries could complement other environmental initiatives in the Comprehensive Plan.
- Should the definition highlight the bird species most notable in Occoquan, such as vultures/buzzards, ospreys, bald eagles, and cormorants?
- Should it specifically exclude invasive bird species, such as the English sparrow?
- Does it include mitigation strategies concerning invasive species like outdoor house cats that are very stressful on bird species?
- Should the code address environmental concerns such as light pollution and river pollution?

Links

Code of Virginia, 24VAC30-151-570. Miscellaneous signs

<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title24/agency30/chapter151/section570/>

DWR "Town of Occoquan"

<https://dwr.virginia.gov/vbwt/sites/town-of-occoquan/>

Independence, VA Code

https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/independenceva/latest/independence_va/0-0-0-2627

Proposal to Enforce and Enhance Outdoor Lighting Regulations in Occoquan

Summary

As a designated bird sanctuary, the Town of Occoquan has a responsibility to reduce artificial light pollution that disrupts wildlife. Unshielded residential and commercial lighting, especially spotlights and back porch lights near wooded areas, interferes with nocturnal wildlife and migratory birds, leading to exhaustion, predation, and fatal collisions. This proposal recommends stricter enforcement of existing regulations and updates to the town's lighting ordinance to protect the ecosystem while maintaining Occoquan's natural character and promoting responsible lighting practices.

Impact of Artificial Lighting on Wildlife

Detrimental Effects on Migratory Birds

- Artificial lighting confuses nocturnal migrants, causing them to stray from natural flight paths and increasing the risk of fatal collisions.
- Bright lights trap birds in illuminated areas, leading to exhaustion and making them more vulnerable to predators.

Disruptions to Nocturnal Wildlife

- Many species rely on darkness for foraging, reproduction, and predator avoidance. Excessive lighting interferes with these behaviors.
- Insects, a key food source for many birds and bats, are drawn to artificial light, disrupting natural food chains.

Ecosystem Imbalance

- Alterations in wildlife behavior due to artificial lighting can have cascading effects on entire ecosystems, impacting species interactions and biodiversity.

Current Outdoor Lighting Regulations (Occoquan Town Code § 157.285)

Acceptable Lighting

- Fully shielded fixtures directing light downward.
- No trespass beyond property boundaries.
- Light trespass cannot exceed **0.5 foot-candles** at the property line to reduce impact on neighbors and wildlife.
- Single-family homes are limited to fixtures with a maximum of **180 watts** to prevent light spillover onto adjacent properties.

Unacceptable Lighting

- Unshielded fixtures allowing light to spill upward and outward.

- Lighting that exceeds the **0.5 foot-candle limit** at the property line.

Examples of 100-Lumen Lights for Context

- Standard nightlight: **50-100 lumens**.
- 10-watt LED bulb: **~800 lumens** (100 lumens is a dimmed equivalent).
- Typical pathway lights: **50-150 lumens**.

Recommendations

1. Educate the Public - Raise awareness among residents and businesses about light pollution impacts, particularly on migratory birds, and best practices for responsible outdoor lighting.
2. Adopt Wildlife-Friendly Lighting - Encourage warm-toned (amber/yellow) lights, motion sensors, timers, and directional lighting to minimize impact on wooded areas.
3. Review and Enhance Regulations - Update standards using best practices from DarkSky International.
4. Engage with HOAs and Community Groups - Work with local homeowner associations, such as the Townes of Occoquan, particularly for homes bordering wooded areas, to implement lighting guidelines and distribute educational materials.
5. Clarify Jurisdiction Over Commercial Areas - Determine regulatory authority over Gordon Blvd commercial spaces.