



# TOWN OF OCCOQUAN

Circa 1734 | Chartered 1804 | Incorporated 1874

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## PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

### March 24, 2026 | 6:30 PM

1. **Call to Order**
2. **Citizens' Time** - Members of the public may, for three minutes, present for the purpose of directing attention to or requesting action on matters not included on the prepared agenda. These matters shall be referred to the appropriate town official(s) for investigation and report. Citizens may address issues as they come up on the agenda if advance notice is given during 'Citizens' Time
3. **Approval of Minutes**
  - a. February 24, 2026 Meeting Minutes
4. **Discussion Items**
  - a. Green Improvement Strategic Plan
  - b. Comprehensive Plan 2026-2036
5. **Adjournment**

Eliot Perkins  
Chair, Planning Commission



# TOWN OF OCCOQUAN PLANNING COMMISSION

## Agenda Communication

<b>3. Approval of Minutes</b>	<b>Meeting Date:</b> March 24, 2026
<b>3A: February 24, 2026 Meeting Minutes</b>	

**Attachments:** a. February 24, 2026 Meeting Minutes

**Submitted by:** Don Wood  
Planning Commission Secretary

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**Explanation and Summary:**

This is a request to approve the meeting minutes from the February 24, 2026 Planning Commission Meetings.

**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: 2026-02-24**

**MEETING TIME: 6:30 PM**

**Present:** Chairperson Elliot Perkins, Commissioners Darryl Hawkins, Ralph Newell, Margaret Pepin, Samantha Sparks, Don Wood

**Town Staff:** Adam Linn, Town Manager; Megan Lubash, Assistant Town Manager/Town Clerk

## 1. Call to Order

- a. The meeting was called to order at 6:31 pm.

## 2. Approval of Minutes

- a. Commissioner Newel moved to approve the December 16, 2025 meeting minutes. Commissioner Pepin seconded. Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.
- b. Commissioner Newel moved to approve the January 20, 2026 meeting minutes. Commissioner Sparks seconded. Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

## 3. Nominations and Elections of Officers

- a. Commissioner Wood nominated Chair Perkins for Chairman. Commissioner Pepin nominated Commissioner Sparks as Vice-Chair. Chair Perkins nominated Commissioner Wood for Secretary. Commissioner Wood moved to name the entire slate. Commissioner Pepin seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

## 4. Discussion Items

- a. 2026-2036 Comprehensive Plan. Town Manager Adam Linn gave a high-level overview of suggested revisions in the first four chapters of the proposed revised Comprehensive Plan. Commissioners discussed various aspects of the revised plan, emphasizing general points they would like to see reflected in the final product, including river protection, need for more maps and visuals, and language concerning increased residential density. Chair Perkins asked Commissioners to think about how to approach increased density in the revised Comprehensive Plan. He emphasized the importance of language in the Plan (for example, the difference between “carefully manage” and “allow” in terms of increased density).

- b.** Green Improvement Strategic Plan - Tabled until the next meeting.

**5. Adjournment:**

The meeting adjourned at 7:32pm.

*Minutes Prepared by Don Wood, Planning Commission Secretary  
Minutes Formatted by Megan Lubash, Town Clerk*



# TOWN OF OCCOQUAN PLANNING COMMISSION

## Agenda Communication

<b>4. Discussion Items</b>	<b>Meeting Date:</b> March 24, 2026
<b>4A. Green Improvement Strategic Plan</b>	

**Attachments:** a. Town of Occoquan Green Improvements Strategic Plan

**Submitted by:** Sam Sparks  
Commissioner

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### Explanation and Summary:

Commissioner Sparks investigated and created a strategic plan to decrease invasive species, lessen streambank erosion, improve tree health and increase habitat available for native flora and fauna. Her plan to be discussed has ways for Occoquan to become a regional leader in small-town ecology by addressing interconnected environmental challenges. This is to allow discussion of the topic, timeline, and actions the Town can take to achieve these goals.

## Town of Occoquan Green Improvements Strategic Plan Planning Commission Proposal to Town Council

### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Occoquan has a strategic opportunity to become a regional leader in small-town ecology by addressing interconnected environmental challenges: declining tree canopy, invasive species pressure, streambank erosion, and water quality degradation. This preserves what makes Occoquan beautiful while demonstrating leadership in habitat restoration.

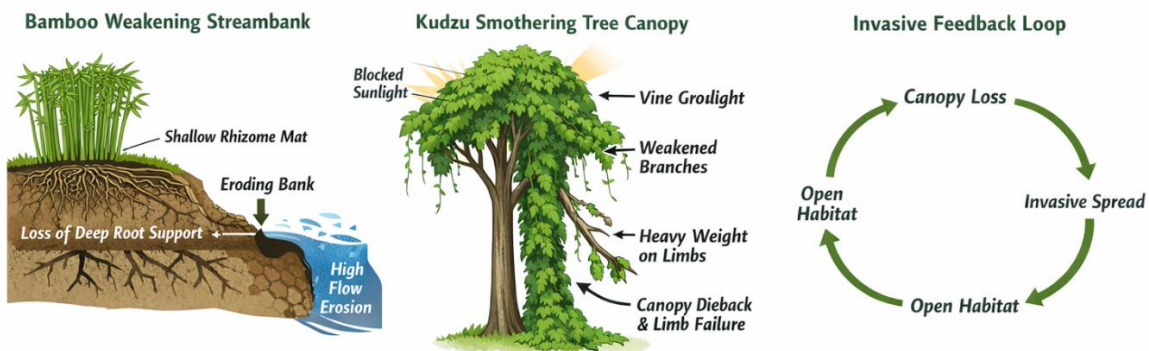
**The challenges are significant but solvable:**

- Tree canopy decline from development pressure and aging trees
- Invasive species (Tree of Heaven, bamboo, kudzu, English ivy) concentrated along streams, destabilizing banks
- Streambank erosion threatening infrastructure and water quality
- Lost habitat as invasives displace native plants

**How We Got Here**

Mid-20th century development treated streams as drainage rather than living systems. Invasives like English ivy and kudzu were planted for "erosion control." No single entity was responsible for stream health, so problems accumulated. Tree canopy and riparian buffers weren't actively maintained, creating deferred ecological risk.

**Why now?** Aging trees, established invasive monocultures, heavier rainfall, and rising water-quality pressures are converging—turning old vulnerabilities into urgent issues (fallen trees on Tacketts Mill, active streambank failures).



## **An Integrated Approach**

Four coordinated programs operating at the intersection of invasive removal, native restoration, water quality monitoring, community engagement, and nonprofit partnerships:

1. **Water Quality Monitoring** - Identify problem areas, measure success
2. **Tree Management** - Preserve and expand canopy
3. **Native Species Restoration** - Remove invasives, stabilize streambanks
4. **Community Recognition** - Celebrate contributions, multiply participation

### **Year 1 Approach: Strategic Pilots**

Rather than attempt comprehensive town-wide work, Year 1 focuses on **2-3 high-visibility pilot sites** to prove methods, build volunteer capacity, and refine cost estimates before scaling.

### **Year 1 Targets:**

- Water quality monitoring at 3-5 key points
- Complete tree inventory; plant 12-15 canopy trees
- Treat 2-3 critical streambank sites; stabilize 50-100 linear feet
- Launch recognition program; honor 3-5 contributors

**Budget Request:** \$30,000 town funds to leverage ~\$20,000 in grants and in-kind support = **~\$50,000 total program value**

*Note: Volunteer time (estimated 150-250 hours) valued at \$25-30/hour for grant applications but NOT part of cash budget*

**Multi-Year Reality:** This is a 3-5 year commitment. Tier 1 invasives (Tree of Heaven, bamboo, kudzu) require repeated treatments. Budget Years 2-3 at ~\$25-35K annually, declining to \$15-20K for maintenance.

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## **2. PROGRAM DETAILS**

### **Program 1: Water Quality Monitoring**

**Mission:** Establish baseline data to identify problems, track improvements, and guide restoration priorities.

### **Approach:**

- **3-5 monitoring sites:** Upstream/downstream of erosion zones; pre/post restoration comparison points

- **Monthly data collection:** Temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, total suspended solids, E. coli
- **Equipment:** Multi-parameter meter (~\$3K one-time cost); consumables
- **Volunteer program:** Train 5-7 volunteers; town staff backup
- **Annual reporting:** Public water quality report card

**Year 1:** Establish protocols, train volunteers, collect 6 months baseline data, correlate with erosion sites

**Budget:** \$4,000 town = **\$4,000 total**

*Note: Year 1 major equipment purchase (~\$3K for multi-parameter meter). Volunteer time counted separately for grant match purposes but not part of budget. Years 2+ drop to ~\$1,000 for consumables.*

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## **Program 2: Tree Management**

**Mission:** Preserve and expand canopy through inventory, strategic planting, and policy.

### **Approach:**

- **Complete GIS inventory** of public trees (parks, streets, town properties)
- **Plant 12-15 native canopy trees/year** with 2-3 year establishment care
- **Species palette:** Oaks, hickories, tulip poplar, red maple, sycamore, river birch
- **Draft tree preservation guidelines** for site plan reviews
- **Maintain Tree City USA status**

**Year 1:** Complete inventory; fall planting event (12-15 trees); draft preservation policy

**Budget:** \$10,000 town + ~\$8,000 grants = **\$18,000 total**

*Note: Grant funding through VA Urban Forest Council and Arbor Day Foundation can cover 40-50% of plant material costs. Volunteer labor for planting events not included in cash budget.*

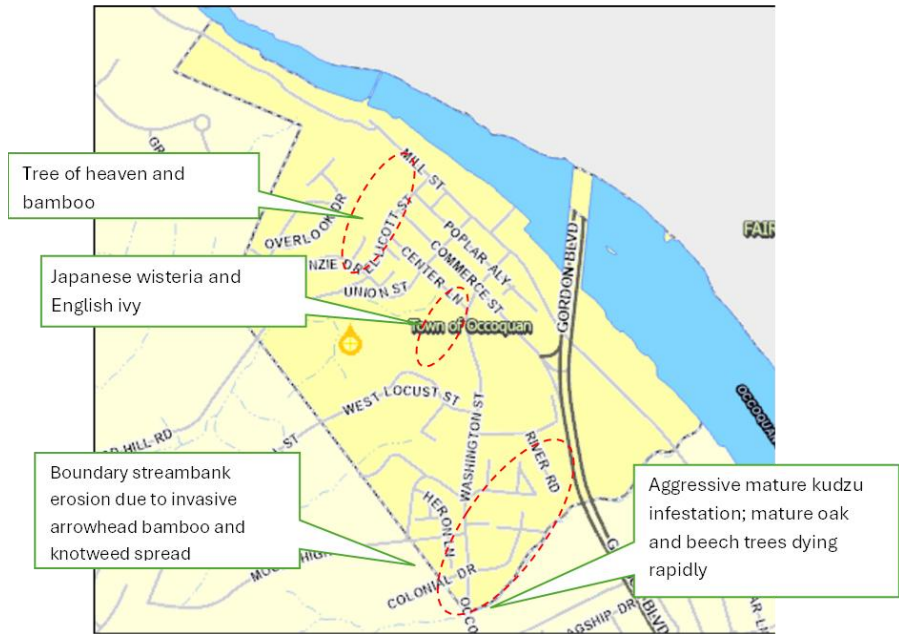
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## **Program 3: Native Species Restoration**

**Mission:** Remove priority invasives, stabilize streambanks, restore habitat.

**Critical Context:**

Invasives along streams are actively causing bank failures. Running bamboo creates shallow root mats (upper 18") that replace deep-rooted natives (6-10' deep). Banks fail during storms. Kudzu grows 1 foot/day, smothers trees, causes tree failures that open canopy for more invasive spread. Kudzu also requires follow-up treatment over 3-5 years before sites reach maintenance phase.



**Tiered Invasive Priorities**

Tier	Species	Why Critical	Treatment	Cost
<b>1 - Streambank Critical</b>	Tree of Heaven	Shallow roots; prevents native growth; causes bank collapse	Hack-and-squirt herbicide mid-summer (when plant moves nutrients to roots); 2-4 follow-ups needed	\$2-3K/pilot site
	Arrowhead bamboo	Running roots create weak shallow mat replacing deep natives	Excavate + barrier OR multi-year cutting + herbicide	\$4-6K/pilot site
	Kudzu	Smothers trees, adds weight, causes tree failure and canopy gaps	Spray leaves late summer + treat root crowns; 3-5 years follow-up	\$1-2K/pilot site
<b>2 - Aggressive</b>	English ivy, Nandina	Prevent native establishment; spread from yards	Pull/cut + treat regrowth	\$500-1K/site

<b>3 - Ongoing</b>	Japanese stiltgrass, others	Prevent spread into restored areas	Monitor and spot-treat	Variable
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**Streambank Restoration Sequence**

**1. Immediate stabilization (within 2-4 weeks of invasive removal)**

- Install erosion control (coir logs, jute) on steep/eroding banks
- Plant fast-rooting native grasses: River oats, Virginia wild rye, fox sedge
- These create root networks within 60-90 days

**2. Long-term stabilization (6-12 months later)**

- Add deep-rooted woody species (4-8' roots): River birch, silky dogwood, buttonbush, swamp white oak
- Herbaceous filter layer: Cardinal flower, joe-pye weed, swamp milkweed
- Target 75% survival at 12 months

**3. Upland/gateway areas**

- Sunny sites: Little bluestem, black-eyed susan, butterfly weed
- Shaded sites: Wild ginger, Christmas fern, solomon's seal

**Connection to water quality:** Focus on sites with high turbidity and visible erosion. Monitor before/after to prove restoration works (expect 2-4°F cooler stream temps with restored canopy).

**Permitting:** Coordinate with VA DEQ for streambank work. Initiate Q1.

**Year 1:** Treat 2-3 pilot streambank sites; install erosion control; plant 300-500 sq ft natives; engage 1-2 private landowners via VCAP workshop

**Budget:** \$13,000 town + ~\$12,000 VCAP reimbursements = **\$25,000 total**

*Note: Year 1 focuses on 2-3 pilot sites. Tier 1 invasives are expensive but address critical infrastructure threat. VCAP provides 50-75% reimbursement on participating private properties. Volunteer labor for planting/maintenance not included in cash budget.*

**Program 4: Community Recognition**

**Mission:** Celebrate contributions to build participation.

**Award Categories:**

- Individual/Organization Green Steward
- Green Innovation
- Volunteer Champion
- Youth Leadership

**Process:** Open nominations quarterly → PC reviews → Council recognizes at meetings → Feature on website/social media

**Year 1:** Establish nomination process; recognize 3-5 contributors

**Budget:** \$2,000 (certificates, plaques, event)

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**3. IMPLEMENTATION**

**Phase 1: Foundation (Year 1)**

**Q1: Planning**

- PC approves plan
- Select monitoring sites; order equipment
- Begin tree inventory
- Map critical streambank erosion sites
- Establish award criteria
- Partner agreements (PWSWCD, PRISM, Earth Sangha)
- VA DEQ permitting consultation

**Q2: Launch**

- Train 5-7 water quality volunteers; begin monthly monitoring
- Complete tree inventory; identify fall planting sites
- Treat 1-2 pilot streambank sites; install erosion control
- Open first award nominations
- Host VCAP workshop

**Q3: Execute**

- Continue monitoring
- Fall tree planting (12-15 trees) with volunteers
- Replant treated streambanks with natives
- First recognition ceremony at Council
- Volunteer planting day

**Q4: Assess**

- Analyze 6 months baseline water quality data
- Draft tree preservation policy
- Evaluate pilot site results; document lessons learned
- Second award nominations
- Report to Council: Full year results, Year 2 budget request

**Phase 1 Targets:**

- 3-5 monitoring sites active; 40+ data points
- 12-15 trees planted; 90% survival; inventory complete
- 2-3 pilot sites treated; 50-100 linear feet streambank stabilized; 300-500 sq ft natives
- 3-5 awards presented; 50+ volunteer hours

**Phase 2: Scale & Refine (Year 2)**

- Add monitoring sites as needed
- Spring + fall planting (total 12-15 more trees)
- Expand to 2-3 additional streambank sites
- 2-3 private landowner VCAP projects
- Tree preservation policy adopted
- Apply for Tree City USA Growth Award

**Phase 2 Targets:**

- 12+ months water quality data; measurable trends
- 25-30 total trees; preservation policy adopted
- 4-5 sites under management; 150-250 linear feet stabilized (cumulative)

- 10-15 total awards; program gains regional visibility

**Phase 3: Sustain (Year 3+)**

- Multi-year trend analysis
- 30-40 trees planted annually
- Majority of critical streambanks stabilized
- Self-sustaining volunteer pipeline
- Costs decline to \$15-20K annually as sites reach maintenance

**4. BUDGET SUMMARY – YEAR 1**

Program	Town Cash	Grants/In-Kind	Total Value
Water Quality	\$4,000	—	\$4,000
Tree Management	\$10,000	\$8,000 (grants)	\$18,000
Native Species	\$13,000	\$12,000 (VCAP grants)	\$25,000
Recognition	\$2,000	—	\$2,000
Coordination	\$1,000	—	\$1,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$30,000</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>

**Volunteer hours (150-250 estimated) are NOT included in cash budget.** They're counted for grant match requirements only.

**External funding sources:**

- VCAP: 50-75% reimbursement on private properties (counts toward match)
- Tree grants: VA Urban Forest Council, Arbor Day Foundation
- Partner in-kind: Earth Sangha, PRISM provide technical support and plant material at reduced cost

**Years 2-3 outlook:** \$25-35K cash annually with declining costs by Year 4 as sites transition to maintenance.

**5. RISKS & MITIGATION**

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
<b>Volunteer gaps</b>	Train 5-7 (redundancy); staff backup
<b>Tree mortality</b>	Local species; 2-3 year care; 90% survival target
<b>Invasive regrowth</b>	Multi-year commitment; aggressive follow-up; never assume one treatment works
<b>Streambank erosion worsens</b>	Erosion control within 2-4 weeks; never remove during high water; rapid replanting
<b>Permitting delays</b>	Start VA DEQ talks Q1; low-impact pilots first
<b>Herbicide concerns</b>	EPA-approved aquatic formulations; transparent communication; document safety
<b>Low participation</b>	PC proactive outreach; feature success stories; simplify processes
<b>Budget shortfalls</b>	Phase work; prioritize highest-impact sites; leverage VCAP for private land

## 6. NEXT STEPS

### Immediate (Next 2 Months):

1. PC discussion and refinement
2. Assign PC leads: Water Quality, Invasives/Natives, Community Engagement, Grants
3. Schedule partner meetings
4. Prepare Council presentation

### Council Presentation:

- Present integrated plan emphasizing pilot approach
- Explain how invasives are destabilizing banks (infrastructure threat)
- Show cost comparison: prevention vs. emergency repairs
- Request \$30K Year 1 budget
- Seek authorization for partner MOUs, permitting, awards

### Upon Approval (Q1):

- Finalize protocols

- Consult non-profit organizations on best practices
- Order equipment
- Begin tree inventory
- Map erosion sites and invasive species hot zones
- Recruit volunteers
- Launch VCAP partnership
- Initiate VA DEQ discussions

## APPENDICES

### A. Preliminary Treatment Timing Calendar

Species	Best Treatment Window	Why Timing Matters
<b>Tree of Heaven</b>	Mid-July to September	Herbicide before mid-July only kills top; mid-summer kills roots
<b>Bamboo</b>	May-October (spray leaves)	Active growth period for herbicide uptake
<b>Kudzu</b>	Late July-September	Best time to reach root crowns
<b>English Ivy</b>	April-June (pull); Sept-Oct (spray regrowth)	Before flowering; active growth

### B. Example Native Plant Palette

#### Streambank (erosion control):

- Grasses: River oats, Virginia wild rye, fox sedge
- Shrubs: Silky dogwood, buttonbush, ninebark
- Trees: River birch, sycamore, swamp white oak

#### Upland/Gateway:

- Sunny: Little bluestem, black-eyed susan, purple coneflower
- Shade: Wild ginger, Christmas fern, solomon's seal

### C. Key Partners

- **PWSWCD:** VCAP administration, monitoring training

- **Blue Ridge PRISM (Plant NOVA Natives):** Invasive treatment methods
- **Earth Sangha:** Native plant sourcing
- **VA Urban Forest Council:** Tree grants
- **VA DEQ:** Streambank permitting
- **FOTO (Friends of the Occoquan):** Outreach and communication
- **Merrimac Farm Master Naturalists:** Education events, monitoring, volunteer work days









# TOWN OF OCCOQUAN PLANNING COMMISSION

## Agenda Communication

<b>4. Discussion Items</b>	<b>Meeting Date:</b> March 24, 2026
<b>4B. Comprehensive Plan 2026-2036</b>	

**Attachments:** a. Comprehensive Plan 2026-2036 – Draft

**Submitted by:** Adam Linn  
Town Manager

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**Explanation and Summary:**

This discussion item continues the review and update of the Town’s Comprehensive Plan.

TOWN OF OCCOQUAN  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
VISION 2036  
2026-2036

**Town Council**

Earnest W. Porta, Jr., Mayor  
Jenn Loges, Vice Mayor  
Cindy Fithian  
Eliot Perkins  
Theo Daubresse  
Robert Love

**Planning Commission**

[Eliot Perkins](#), Chair  
[Samantha Sparks](#), Vice Chair  
[Don Woods](#), Secretary  
[Rich Grant](#), Commissioner  
[Darryl Hawkins](#), Commissioner  
[Kerry Jetton](#), Commissioner  
[Margaret Pepin](#), Commissioner  
[Ralph Newell](#), Commissioner

**Town Staff**

Adam C. Linn, Town Manager

**Technical Support**

Legacy Engineering, P.C.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction and Overview .....	4
Purpose and Intent .....	4
Scope of the Plan .....	4
The Planning Process .....	<a href="#">Error! Bookmark not defined.</a> <sup>6</sup>
Assessment Survey Leading Comp Plan Concerns and Issues .....	<a href="#">Error! Bookmark not defined.</a> <sup>7</sup>
Plan Themes .....	68
CHAPTER TWO: Occoquan Yesterday and Today .....	889
Our Location/Setting .....	889
Our History .....	9910
Our Numbers - Population Characteristics .....	12
Our Existing Footprint and Land Use .....	1615
CHAPTER THREE: Occoquan 2026: Imaging Tomorrow Today .....	2018
Our Vision .....	2018
Our Goals - Comprehensive Plan Themes .....	2018
Our Plan for 2026 .....	2119
CHAPTER FOUR: Community Character & Community Life .....	2320
Goal .....	2320
Overview .....	2320
Housing and Housing Affordability .....	2320
Neighborhood Preservation and Revitalization .....	2421
Community Services and Facilities .....	2521
Parks, Open Space, Public Space .....	2621
CHAPTER FIVE: Circulation and Mobility .....	2823
Goal .....	2923
Overview .....	2923
Traffic .....	3326
Parking .....	3428
Sidewalks .....	3529
Gateways .....	3932
Emergency Evacuation Planning .....	4033
CHAPTER SIX: Economic Vitality & Diversity .....	4234
Goal .....	4234

Overview .....	<a href="#">4234</a>
Commercial Areas .....	<a href="#">4335</a>
Economic Catalyst Sites .....	<a href="#">Error! Bookmark not defined.36</a>
Historic Preservation and Appearance.....	<a href="#">4537</a>
CHAPTER SEVEN: Environmental Stewardship .....	<a href="#">4839</a>
Goal.....	<a href="#">4839</a>
Overview and Vision.....	<a href="#">4839</a>
Chesapeake Bay and the River Connection .....	<a href="#">4939</a>
Environmental Programs and Regulations.....	<a href="#">5546</a>
Trees and Landscaping .....	<a href="#">6250</a>
Solid Waste Disposal and Recycling .....	<a href="#">6250</a>
Green Building, Noise and Lighting .....	<a href="#">6351</a>
CHAPTER EIGHT: Regional Coordination.....	<a href="#">6552</a>
Goal.....	<a href="#">6552</a>
Overview and Vision.....	<a href="#">6552</a>
Shared Border Area Plans - Prince William County .....	<a href="#">6552</a>
Shared Border Area Plans - Fairfax County .....	<a href="#">6753</a>
Shared Border Area Plans - Lake Ridge Parks and Recreation Association .....	<a href="#">6754</a>
CHAPTER NINE: Implementation & Accountability .....	<a href="#">6956</a>
Overview and Vision.....	<a href="#">6956</a>
Annual Plan Accountability Report.....	<a href="#">6956</a>
Action Plan.....	<a href="#">6956</a>

## CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

### Purpose and Intent

Successful communities do not occur by chance; they are the result of deliberate, continuous planning, and policy direction. In accordance with § 15.2-2223 of the Code of Virginia, the Town of Occoquan Comprehensive Plan is intended to guide and accomplish a coordinated, adjusted, and harmonious development of the Town that promotes the health, safety, and general welfare of its residents. The Plan provides a framework for managing growth and change in a manner that preserves the Town's unique character, supports efficient public services and facilities, and responds to evolving social, economic, and environmental conditions.

This document is an update to the Town of Occoquan 2016–2026 Comprehensive Plan, as amended in 2021, and builds upon the policy direction established in prior comprehensive plans. It establishes an updated long-range vision for the physical development of the Town and addresses the orderly development and redevelopment of land, the provision and coordination of public facilities and services, and the conservation and enhancement of natural, historic, and cultural resources. Consistent with § 15.2-2223, the Plan addresses a broad range of topics related to land use and community development, including transportation, housing, parks and open space, community facilities and services, economic development, and community character.

Once adopted, this Comprehensive Plan shall serve as the official policy guide for the physical development of the Town of Occoquan. The elected and appointed officials of the Town should use the Plan to inform decisions related to land use, development, redevelopment, capital improvements, and the provision of public services. While the Comprehensive Plan describes desired land use patterns and development policies, it does not itself regulate land use. Implementation of the Plan occurs through zoning regulations, subdivision and site plan standards, capital improvement programming, and other regulatory and administrative tools. Accordingly, this Plan includes an implementation strategy designed to carry out the goals, objectives, and policies set forth herein in a manner consistent with Virginia law.

### Scope of the Plan

The Commonwealth of Virginia requires the Town of Occoquan to prepare and adopt a Comprehensive Plan for the physical development of land within its jurisdiction. This requirement is set forth in § 15.2-2223 of the Code of Virginia, which provides that the Comprehensive Plan shall guide and accomplish a coordinated, adjusted, and harmonious development of the Town. The Plan is intended to promote, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare of the inhabitants of the Town, including the elderly and persons with disabilities.

In addition, § 15.2-2230 of the Code of Virginia requires that each locality review its Comprehensive Plan at least once every five years to determine whether amendments are necessary to reflect changes in local conditions, development trends, or state and regional policy. This update is undertaken in fulfillment of that statutory review requirement and reflects the Town's commitment to maintaining a current, relevant, and effective long-range planning document.

To fulfill these statutory purposes, the Comprehensive Plan evaluates existing conditions within the Town, examines historic and projected growth trends, and considers future conditions that may affect land use, public facilities, transportation, housing, and community services. The Plan establishes long-range policy guidance to direct development and redevelopment in a manner that is consistent with the Town's character and capacity for growth.

Pursuant to Virginia law, responsibility for preparing and recommending the Comprehensive Plan rests with the Occoquan Planning Commission, while responsibility for adopting the Plan rests with the Occoquan Town Council. In accordance with § 15.2-2223, the Comprehensive Plan designates the general and approximate location, character, and extent of each feature included in the Plan and serves as the official statement of policy for the physical development of the Town.

The Virginia Code requires that a Comprehensive Plan include, at a minimum, the following elements, which are addressed through the themes and chapters of this Plan:

1. Long-range recommendations. The Comprehensive Plan shall include long-range recommendations for the general development of the Town, addressing anticipated growth, redevelopment, and preservation needs over the planning horizon.
2. Transportation plan. The Comprehensive Plan shall include a transportation plan that identifies existing and future transportation needs and recommendations. This may include roadways, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, bridges, waterways, and public transportation facilities necessary to support planned development and mobility within the Town.
3. Road and transportation map. The Comprehensive Plan shall include a map or maps depicting existing and proposed transportation facilities and improvements. In meeting this requirement, the Plan considers the current and future transportation needs of Occoquan residents and the broader planning district within which the Town is located.
4. Affordable housing. The Comprehensive Plan shall designate areas and include policies to promote the construction and maintenance of affordable housing sufficient to meet the current and future needs of residents of all income levels. ~~This element considers both local needs and the needs of the planning district in which Occoquan is situated.~~ In addressing this element, it is important to recognize Occoquan's unique context,

including extremely limited undeveloped land, few properties suitable for redevelopment, and additional constraints within the historic district that guide scale, character, and design. As a result, opportunities to expand affordable housing are inherently limited and must be pursued through context-sensitive strategies, partnerships, and regional coordination, while considering both local conditions and the broader housing needs of the planning district in which Occoquan is situated.

- 4.
5. Traditional neighborhood design. If urban development areas are designated in the Comprehensive Plan, the Plan must incorporate principles of traditional neighborhood design. These principles may include, but are not limited to:
- Pedestrian-friendly street design,
  - Connectivity of street and pedestrian networks,
  - Preservation of natural areas,
  - Mixed-use neighborhoods including mixed housing types, and
  - Reduction of front and side yard setbacks, narrower subdivision street widths, and reduced turning radii at street intersections, where appropriate.

### Plan Themes

Since its founding, the Town of Occoquan has intentionally preserved its small-town character, historic identity, and distinctive sense of place. Maintaining these qualities continues to be a central objective of local planning efforts and remains fundamental to the Town's vision for the future.

As part of this review and update to the 2016–2026 Occoquan Comprehensive Plan, as amended in 2021, Town staff and members of the Planning Commission undertook a comprehensive review of the existing Plan. This review included an evaluation of current land use patterns, development activity, infrastructure and transportation systems, environmental resources, economic conditions, intergovernmental relationships, and the effectiveness of prior plan policies and implementation actions. Drawing on professional expertise, institutional knowledge, and an understanding of changing local and regional conditions, staff and Planning Commission members assessed whether the existing planning framework continued to reflect the Town's needs and priorities.

Based on this assessment, staff and the Planning Commission determined that the overarching planning themes established in the prior Comprehensive Plan remain relevant and appropriate. While specific policies and implementation strategies may be updated or refined, the core themes continue to provide a sound and effective framework for guiding future decision-making and long-range planning efforts.

This review acknowledges that certain plan themes or elements within may, at times, create tension or conflict if careful and deliberate coordination is not maintained. When such conflicts arise, they should be thoughtfully evaluated and balanced to minimize impacts, ensure consistency with the Town's overall vision, and support informed decision-making that advances the Comprehensive Plan as a whole.

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Accordingly, the Comprehensive Plan continues to be organized around the following planning themes:

- Sustain Occoquan’s community character and distinctive quality of life.
- Enhance Occoquan’s circulation and mobility with an emphasis on pedestrian safety.
- Sustain and enhance Occoquan’s business/historic district while diversifying the town’s economic base.
- Witness environmental stewardship by living in harmony with our diverse natural environment.
- Partner with neighboring localities to coordinate planning and governance matters of mutual interest.
- Commit to developing a comprehensive plan implementation schedule and accountability metric.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Occoquan Yesterday and Today

### Our Location/Setting

Occoquan is located along the Occoquan River in the northeastern portion of Prince William County bordering Fairfax County. The Town encompasses approximately 125 acres, including roughly 25 acres of the Occoquan River. While the developed portions of the Town are situated primarily along the southern shoreline of the river, the municipal boundary extends into Fairfax County.



Figure 1 View of Occoquan from Fairfax County, 2019

Occoquan is situated at the geological “fall line,” which marks the transition between the Piedmont and Coastal Plain provinces and represents the upper limit of navigable waters on the Occoquan River. The downtown area and Poplar Lane neighborhood are located on a relatively level, low-lying plain adjacent to the river.

Southwest of this river plain, the land rises to a ridge underlain primarily by granite bedrock. This ridge is dissected by several small streams that flow into the Occoquan River, including Ballywhack Branch, the largest of these waterways, as well as Furnace Branch, Boundary Branch, Phelps Creek, and Edgehill Creek, a tributary of Boundary Branch. Higher elevations within the Town are generally rolling, with areas of steep slopes and rocky outcrops, particularly along stream corridors and near the river plain. These natural features have helped shape development patterns and contribute to Occoquan’s scenic and environmental character.



Map 1 Early map showing the location of Occoquan Flour Mill, 1879

While the Town of Occoquan has successfully preserved its small-town scale and pedestrian-oriented character, surrounding areas of Prince William County differ markedly in terms of development scale, density, and population. Within a one-mile radius of the Town are several automobile-oriented shopping centers and a commuter parking facility, which stand in sharp contrast to Occoquan’s walkable historic core and village atmosphere. The neighboring unincorporated communities of Woodbridge and Lake Ridge have substantially

larger populations, approximately 43,443<sup>1</sup> residents in Woodbridge and roughly 45,007<sup>2</sup> residents in Lake Ridge as of the 2023 estimate, far exceeding Occoquan's population of about 1,089<sup>3</sup> residents in 2024.

Regionally, Occoquan is part of Northern Virginia's Washington metropolitan area and functions as a historic riverfront community within a broader suburban and regional employment context. The Town is located near major transportation corridors, including Route 123 (Gordon Boulevard), Interstate 95, and the Fairfax County Parkway, providing access to regional employment centers while also subjecting Occoquan to commuter and visitor traffic pressures. Its proximity to neighboring jurisdictions, including Prince William County and Fairfax County, underscores the importance of coordinated planning efforts related to transportation, economic development, environmental protection, and tourism.

### Our History

Occoquan established its commercial and residential foundations well before Virginia became a colony. In the early seventeenth century, Captain John Smith traveled the Occoquan River as part of his efforts to establish trade routes between the Dogue Indians and English settlers. The area's rolling hills, powerful waterfalls, and natural beauty attracted early entrepreneurs, including John Ballendine. In the late eighteenth century, Ballendine helped establish Occoquan as a full-service town, with mills, forges, stores, tolling points, and residential development that supported both local commerce and regional trade.



Figure 2 Rockledge Mansion, 2016

Among the most notable historic residences is Rockledge Mansion, constructed circa 1760 using Virginia bluestone quarried locally in Occoquan. The residence is believed to have been designed by the renowned architect William Buckland and was intentionally sited overlooking the Town, consistent with John Ballendine's vision. Over time, Rockledge served multiple functional roles within the community, including use as a bakery, icehouse, and spring well.

Ballendine also constructed one of the most internationally significant mills of the late eighteenth century. This mill, recognized as the first automated mill in North America, played a critical role in establishing Occoquan as a regional industrial center. The structure now serves as the Mill House Museum, operated by the Occoquan Historical Society.

<sup>1</sup> 2023 Census Reporter - <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US5187312-woodbridge-va/>

<sup>2</sup> 2023 Census Reporter - <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US5143432-lake-ridge-va/>

<sup>3</sup> 2023 Census Reporter - <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US5158696-occoquan-va/>

The success and appeal of eighteenth-century Occoquan attracted additional entrepreneurs and settlers. Among the most prominent was Nathaniel Ellicott, who officially settled in the area after founding Ellicott City, Maryland. Occoquan was formally platted in 1804, with the plat recorded in early 1805, and the original town boundaries established at that time form the basis of the current Historic District.

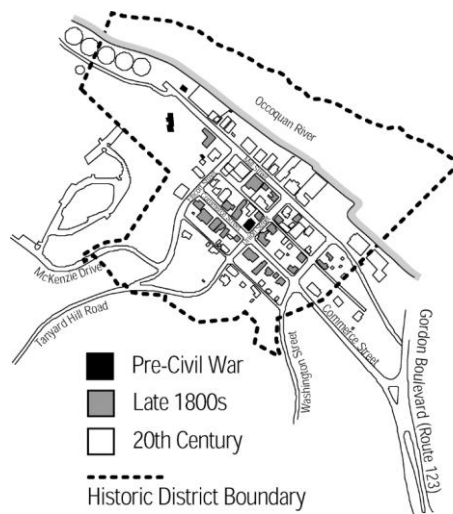
The nineteenth century marked a period of continued prosperity for Occoquan, as residential and commercial development expanded to serve travelers and commerce linked to the Nation’s Capital. Many buildings constructed during this era remain intact today, particularly along Mill Street and Commerce Street, contributing significantly to the Town’s historic character and sense of place.

Map No. 2 illustrates the location of older buildings within the central area of the Town and identifies their approximate periods of construction. The map also depicts the Town’s Historic District, as adopted in August 1999, which generally reflects the boundaries established in the 1804 town plat. While the adopted Historic District encompasses a broader area, the Town’s historic core is more accurately characterized as extending from the Occoquan River southward to Center Lane, where the greatest concentration of historic resources and earliest development patterns remain intact.

In 2014, the Town’s corporate boundary was extended westward to include a one-acre parcel owned by Fairfax Water. This parcel has since been converted to parkland and is now owned and maintained by the Town, contributing to public open space and recreational opportunities while complementing the Town’s historic and environmental assets.

In 1916, a major fire destroyed a number of commercial structures along Commerce, Union, and Mill Streets, significantly impacting the Town’s commercial core. Additional fires over the years resulted in the loss of other important buildings, including the flour mill in 1924 and Ebenezer Church in 1923. The church was rebuilt the following year on the same site, where it remains today as the Occoquan Peace Center.

The twentieth century presented a series of challenges for Occoquan. Heavy silting of the Occoquan River and the transfer of control of the river’s dam to a regional water authority diminished water-based transportation and recreational uses that had long supported the Town’s economy. Repeated fires and severe storms further damaged historic structures, and



Map No. 2 Occoquan Historic District and Age of Structures

the construction of Route 1 and Interstate 95 shifted regional travel patterns, temporarily reducing Occoquan’s role as a commercial destination.

Despite these setbacks, Occoquan has demonstrated long-standing resilience. Through local leadership, preservation efforts, and a proactive approach to community revitalization, the Town successfully reestablished itself as a vibrant historic riverfront community and regional destination.

In 1984, Occoquan was formally recognized as a National Register Historic District, acknowledging its architectural, historical, and cultural significance. Within the Historic District are numerous individually registered buildings and sites that collectively contribute to the Town’s distinctive character. The Town’s zoning framework supports a compatible mix of residential and commercial uses, reinforcing both economic vitality and livability. Oversight by the Architectural Review Board ensures that new construction and exterior alterations are consistent with historic design standards, helping preserve Occoquan’s historic appearance and continuing to attract residents and visitors alike.

In the early 2000s, the Town undertook initiatives to further highlight and interpret its rich historic heritage, including the creation of a self-guided walking tour and the installation of commemorative markers throughout the Town. Each marker features interpretive text on one side and an etched image derived from historic photographs on the other, providing both historical context and visual reference.

To date, fourteen (14) markers have been installed. These markers are currently being refurbished through an Adopt-a-Sign program administered by the Occoquan Historical Society, which supports ongoing maintenance and community engagement in historic preservation efforts.

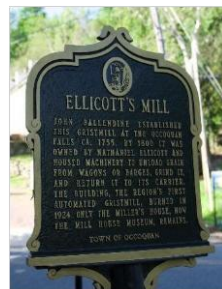


Figure 3 Refurbished historic marker at the Mill House Museum, 2016

### Historic Preservation Issues

- Preservation and ongoing maintenance of historic buildings, streetscapes, and the overall historic character of Occoquan.
- Rehabilitation of historic structures that are substandard, deteriorated, or in a derelict condition.
- Management of the impacts of infill development and redevelopment within and adjacent to the Historic District to ensure compatibility with historic resources.
- Securing funding for projects that expand, promote, and protect properties of historic significance, including the Mill House Museum.
- Reevaluate and revise the boundaries of the Historic District to encompass the area extending from the Occoquan River southward to Center Lane, where the greatest concentration of historic resources and the earliest development patterns remain

intact, in order to provide more effective protection and preservation of these significant assets.

## Our Numbers – Population Characteristics

### *Our Demographics*

Demographic characteristics and trends provide an important foundation for evaluating land use patterns, public service needs, and infrastructure requirements within a community. Demographic data also offer insight into a locality’s overall vitality, stability, and attractiveness as a place to live, work, and visit. Accordingly, a clear understanding of population and household characteristics is an essential component of informed, long-range community planning.

### *Our Growing Numbers*

According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau and recent population estimates, the Town of Occoquan has experienced notable demographic change over the past several decades. From 1980 to 2023, Occoquan’s population increased from 241 residents to approximately 1,089. This is an addition of 848 people, representing a 352% increase over the 43-year period. This growth reflects Occoquan’s enduring appeal and relative population expansion compared to larger surrounding jurisdictions.

For comparison, between 1980 and 2023:

- Prince William County grew from 144,703 residents to an estimated 482,000+, an increase of over 237%.
- The Commonwealth of Virginia’s total population grew from approximately 5.35 million to roughly 8.7 million, representing an increase of only about 63%.

These trends indicate that Occoquan’s rate of population growth since 1980 has outpaced that of both Prince William County and the Commonwealth of Virginia, underscoring the Town’s unique demographic trajectory within the region.

Table one reflects the numbers.

**Table No. 1 Population Changes in Occoquan, Prince William County and Virginia**

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2023 (Estimate)	<del>2030</del> Percent Change (1980-2019)
<b>Town of Occoquan</b>	241	338	759	934	1,035	1,089	<del>352%</del> 1,300
<b>Prince William County</b>	144,703	215,686	280,813	402,2002	482,204	495,000	<del>242%</del> 578,119

<b>Virginia</b>	5,346,818	6,187,538	7,078,515	8,001,024	8,631,393	8,700,000	<del>63%</del> <u>9,311,426</u>
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*Our Numbers*

With the release of the most recent U.S. Census in 2020, updated population counts for the Town of Occoquan are now available. However, detailed demographic and socioeconomic characteristics for small jurisdictions such as Occoquan continue to rely primarily on decennial census data and multi-year American Community Survey (ACS) estimates. As a result, the 2010 and 2020 Census data, supplemented where appropriate by recent ACS estimates, provide the most reliable sources for understanding the Town’s population attributes and trends.

Reviewing these data, and where relevant comparing them with information from prior census years, offers elected and appointed officials important insight into the pace, scale, and character of demographic change in Occoquan. This information informs policy decisions related to land use, housing, transportation, public services, and infrastructure planning. Accordingly, the following table presents selected demographic data drawn from the U.S. Census for 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2020, with additional context provided by recent estimates where appropriate.

**Table No. 2: Occoquan Population Characteristics 1990-2020 and 2023 Estimates**

	1990	2000	2010	2020	2023 Estimates
Town Population	338	759	934	1,035	1,089
Age Cohort Percentage Under 19:	10.9%	13.1%	12.3%	13.9%	14.5%
Age Cohort Percentage 19-62:	76.7%	72.5%	72.9%	69.4%	68.1%
Age Cohort Percentage Over 62:	12.4%	14.4%	14.8%	16.7%	17.4%
Race-Percentage White	87.3%	85.5%	80.9%	62.1%	60.3%
Race-Percentage Black	9.8%	8.2%	11.6%	14.6%	15.2%
Race-Percentage Asian	2.4%	1.6%	3.3%	15.8%	16.5%
Race-Percentage Hispanic/Latino	0.6%	6.5%	4.0%	8.7%	9.2%
Percent Family Households	71.0%	44.7%	42.9%	50.4%	52.1%
Percent Married Family Couple	23.4%	35.6%	33.7%	40.3%	41.5%
Non-Family Households	29.0%	55.3%	57.1%	49.6%	47.9%
Average Household Size	1.98	1.82	1.78	2.04	2.10
Total Household Units	230	443	569	560	565
Vacancy Rate	24.8%	5.6%	7.7%	6.5%	6.3%

Table 1 above clearly delineates Occoquan’s emergence as a community of choice. The Town has witnessed substantial population growth over the past three decades. From 1990 to 2023, the population increased from 338 residents to an estimated 1,089, representing approximately a 352 percent increase (Table 2). Of particular interest is the growth in the percentage of the Town’s population under the age of 19. Between 1990 and 2023, the under-19 age cohort increased from 10.9 percent to approximately 14.5 percent, reflecting Occoquan’s continued attractiveness for families with children. If this trend continues over the next decade, it could influence the mix of business, recreational, and community services needed to meet the needs of younger residents.

Table 2 also illustrates the extent to which Occoquan’s population has diversified racially and ethnically. In 1990, 87.3 percent of the population was white. By 2023, the white population is estimated at approximately 60.3 percent, while the percentages of Black, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino residents have increased to 15.2 percent, 16.5 percent, and 9.2 percent, respectively. The aggregate share of the non-white population has thus risen from 12.7 percent in 1990 to roughly 39.7 percent in 2023. This demographic shift, if sustained, may influence the types of economic, cultural, and social activities and services that will be in demand within the community, similar to the effect of the growth in the under-19 population.

The increase in the total number of household units further reflects the Town’s population growth. In 1990, Occoquan had 230 households, increasing to approximately 565 households by 2023. This growth parallels the overall population increase and underscores the continuing demand for housing within the Town’s limited land area. If demand for new households persists over the coming decade, careful planning will be required to determine where new housing can be accommodated, while managing the capacity of existing residential zoning districts. Zoning and subdivision planning challenges are already evident in areas such as the downtown business district, where demand for residential and mixed-use development intersects with historic preservation considerations.

It is also important to note that Census demographic categories have evolved slightly over time. For continuity in comparison, the data presented in Table 2 for 2020 and 2023 have been aligned as closely as possible with the 1990 and 2000 categories to maintain consistency in trend analysis.

#### *What the Population Numbers Mean for the Future*

The Town of Occoquan has experienced significant transformation over the past quarter century, driven largely by a sharp increase in population. While it is impossible to predict the future with certainty, it is reasonable to anticipate that Occoquan will continue to be an attractive “community of choice” where people want to live, work, and enjoy life. The Town’s proximity to I-95 and the Nation’s Capital reinforces this potential for continued growth and desirability. As such, this Comprehensive Plan Update should be viewed as an initial framework for determining how the Town can accommodate an additional 150 to 200 residents within its existing boundaries, while maintaining its unique character and historic identity.

Key issues to address in planning for this growth include housing, transportation and circulation, utilities and infrastructure, and public service demands. Enhanced coordination with Prince William County on land use and planning matters that affect Occoquan will also be essential to ensure regional compatibility and sustainability.

In 2016, the Town amended its zoning ordinance to encourage mixed commercial-residential uses in the historic business district (B-1 zone). This change was intended to support the objectives of the Comprehensive Plan and promote a vibrant downtown area that combines both residential and commercial activity. As the Town continues to evolve, further adjustments to zoning and development regulations may be necessary to accommodate growth while preserving the historic and small-town character that defines Occoquan.

***Forward-Looking Considerations: Housing, Transportation, and Public Services***

The projected population growth in Occoquan over the next decade, though modest in absolute numbers, will have meaningful implications for housing, transportation, and public services within the Town's compact boundaries. Proactive planning in these areas will be essential to preserve the Town's small-town character while accommodating new residents.

**Housing Capacity:**

With an estimated 1,089 residents in 2023 and potential growth of 150–200 additional residents over the coming decade, demand for new housing units will increase. Maintaining a balance between residential growth and historic preservation will be critical. Opportunities exist to encourage mixed-use development in the downtown business district and compatible infill residential development in areas zoned for residential use. Careful management of household densities, lot sizes, and building design will ensure that growth does not compromise the Town's character or strain existing infrastructure.

**Transportation and Circulation:**

Population growth and increased residential activity will place additional demand on the Town's transportation network, including local streets, pedestrian pathways, and parking facilities. Enhancing pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, improving traffic flow within the historic district, and coordinating with Prince William County and regional transportation authorities will be essential to maintain safety, mobility, and accessibility. Planning should also consider the impact of commuter traffic given the Town's proximity to I-95 and the broader Northern Virginia region.

**Public Services and Infrastructure:**

Even modest population growth can place pressure on utilities, water and sewer systems, stormwater management, and public services such as [public safety](#), emergency response, recreation, and community programming. Forward-looking planning will require assessment of existing service capacity, identification of potential gaps, and strategic investment to ensure that the Town can continue to meet the needs of residents. Collaboration with regional

partners and utility providers will help maximize efficiency and sustainability while maintaining high-quality service levels.

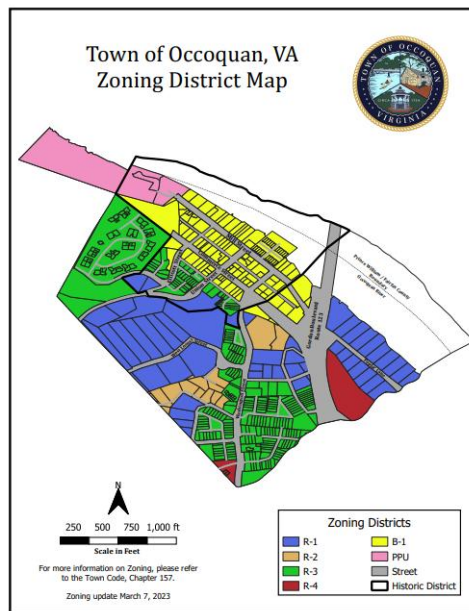
In summary, with continued population growth expected, Occoquan’s future can be both bright and dynamic if thoughtful, proactive, and responsible planning strategies are implemented. By aligning growth management with the Town’s vision and values, Occoquan can continue to thrive as a desirable, livable, and resilient community while ensuring that housing, transportation, and public services evolve in a balanced and sustainable manner.

### Our Existing Footprint and Land Use

Currently, the “heart” of Occoquan is its central business district, located along the entire length of Mill Street and on Commerce Street from Washington Street to Ellicott Street. While the majority of commercial activities are concentrated within this core area, there are a small number of home-based businesses located outside the general business district. The types of businesses generally found in Occoquan are specialty retail, interspersed with restaurants, and service-oriented establishments, contributing to the Town’s unique small-town character and vibrant downtown atmosphere.

The business district and the immediately adjacent residential areas are arranged in a grid pattern established by the 1804 recorded plat, which has historically been recognized as the Historic District. This district is compact and orderly, preserving a quaint character and human scale that stands in stark contrast to the sprawling shopping centers and strip commercial developments found in modern communities. However, the current boundaries of the Historic District extend beyond the original commercial core into more modern residential areas. Adjusting the district boundaries to focus on the Town’s original commercial area will better reflect its historic significance and ensure that preservation efforts are appropriately targeted. The charming, small-town ambience of this core area remains a key factor in Occoquan’s popularity with tourists and shoppers, forming an essential foundation for the Town’s local economy.

In the early 1990s, the town completed the Mill Street Enhancement Project, which included the installation of gas street lights, brick sidewalks, and new curb and gutter intended to improve the aesthetic appeal of the Town’s business district. As part of the Town’s annual



Map No. 3 Existing Land Use Map

budget process, an infrastructure maintenance plan has been developed in order to identify and schedule future improvements within the Town, as well as on other main thoroughfares outside of the Historic District, including brick sidewalks, intersection improvements, and maintenance of town streets. Improvements to these thoroughfares would serve to announce to visitors that one is entering a “small town” and would help to distinguish Occoquan from surrounding areas of Prince William County.

There are several waterfront properties located within the Historic District that have potential for redevelopment and revitalization. Three issues are associated with the redevelopment of these properties, (1) connection to the Occoquan Riverwalk, (2) providing the necessary flexibility and incentives to make development economically viable, and (3) the actual zoning designation of the land.



Figure 4 Gaslights and Sidewalks Installed as part of the Mill Street Enhancement Project, 2020

In particular, the Town must specify how any future uses will link to the Riverwalk. This is



Figure 5 View of Gaslight Landing community and Riverwalk section, Opened in 2015

critical to ensure an adequate number of public access points and that building design takes into account and encourages the use of the Riverwalk. Use type is critical in that uses should lend themselves to Riverwalk activities. If the Town is silent on what kind of uses it would like to see, then it may lose an opportunity to influence the decision-making process. Finally, the Town needs to address whether current zoning restrictions placed on waterfront properties, such as the 35 foot height requirement, need to be more flexible in order to encourage redevelopment of the type desired.

Outside of the Historic District, land use consists of a mixture of residential structures on radial roads and other small streets. Several of the houses are comparable in age to those in the Historic District, while many others are of more recent vintage. Most single-family homes outside of the central area are located on relatively large lots, while homes within the Historic District are on small lots of 5,000 square feet or less.

While many residences within the Town are single-family detached dwellings, the current trend is towards higher density residential development. Projects begun since 1990 include the townhouse addition to Occoquan Mills, single family homes at Hollows II and townhouse units at Dawson's Green, Occoquan Reach, and Berrywood. Since 2010, town homes have been completed at Vistas at Occoquan, Myrtle Banks, Occoquan Heights, Gaslight Landing, Rivertown Overlook, and Kiely Court. With Dawson's Green, Berrywood, Vistas at Occoquan, Berrywood, Rivertown Overlook, and Kiely Court being developed with the current Historic District. Continued development has caused debate over whether the Town should encourage or discourage dense forms of development such as townhouses, both in and out of the Historic District.

Public and semi-public uses within the Town consist of the Town Hall, the Mill House Museum, River Mill Park, Furnace Branch Park, Mamie Davis Park, Riverwalk, canoe, kayak and SUP launch, a church, a cemetery, VFW post, and the post office. All of the above (except the cemetery) are located within or directly adjacent to the Historic District. These facilities are important elements comprising the flavor of Occoquan and are all worthy of preservation.

Many of the debates over development in the Town have as much to do with open space preservation as they do with design and compatibility with existing development patterns. Even with the development of the Occoquan Heights community, there still remains several lots outside of the historic district that are over one acre and have the potential for future redevelopment from low density to higher density uses. The Occoquan River also provides open space and comprises nearly 25 acres within the Town.



Figure 6 Former site of Water Treatment Facility, River Mill Park completed in 2016

Design and development issues will continue to be of major concern for the Town whether dealing with a new residential subdivision or small infill projects. The Town partnered with Prince William County and Fairfax Water to redevelop the old Fairfax Water Treatment Facility into a public park, which opened in July of 2016, and has allowed the town to anchor the northwestern end of its retail district with public open space. In 2021, the Town Council granted special use permits for The Mill at Occoquan project, a mixed used development planned for a one-acre riverfront parcel on Mill Street near River Mill Park that includes a mix of residential and commercial uses, and significantly adds to the development of the public Riverwalk. New projects must continue to be planned in harmony with the surrounding areas and projects, while at the same time maintaining the eclectic mix of residential and business activities already found within the Town's historic business district.



## CHAPTER THREE

# Occoquan 2026: Imagining Tomorrow Today

### Our Vision

Occoquan prides itself on honoring its past while embracing its future. The Town's small-town charm attracts visitors from around the world; its natural beauty draws outdoor and nature enthusiasts; and its successful mixed-use zoning supports a diverse array of businesses and restaurants. Residents and business owners live and work together in a collaborative, supportive environment that enhances Occoquan's reputation and overall quality of life.

Occoquan's vision includes maintaining premier community standards that will secure and promote the Town's vitality well into the twenty-first century and beyond. A central component of this vision is the continued preservation and enhancement of the Historic District, which serves as both an economic asset and a cultural cornerstone. These efforts will be strengthened through the implementation of the updated Comprehensive Plan and the continued stewardship of the Town's leadership.

Additionally, the advancement and eventual completion of the Riverwalk along the Town's waterfront will further elevate Occoquan's appeal as a regional destination, improving public access to the river and reinforcing the Town's identity as a welcoming, walkable historic waterfront community. Occoquan has been—and will continue to be—a premier destination for those who appreciate the character, beauty, and unique benefits of historic riverfront towns.

### Our Goals - Comprehensive Plan Themes

#### 1. Community Character & Community Life

To guide Occoquan's continued physical development so as to maintain a mix of land uses - residential, commercial, and public - reflecting the town's historic identity and image while enhancing the social and economic well-being of its residents, merchants and visitors alike.

#### 2. Circulation and Mobility

To create and maintain a safe and efficient Town-wide mobility and transportation network that is interconnected, multi-modal and reflects a pedestrian-friendly land use pattern.

#### 3. Economic Vitality & Diversity

To promote proactive and sustainable economic development and redevelopment actions in the Occoquan Business and Historic District that respects the district's unique character, balances residential density, and protects its ecological setting, while encouraging a diversity of economic activities in selected target areas of Occoquan.

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#### 4. Environmental Stewardship

To provide for the harmonious use of land that meets the needs of Occoquan, while enhancing the area’s environmental quality.

#### 5. Regional Coordination

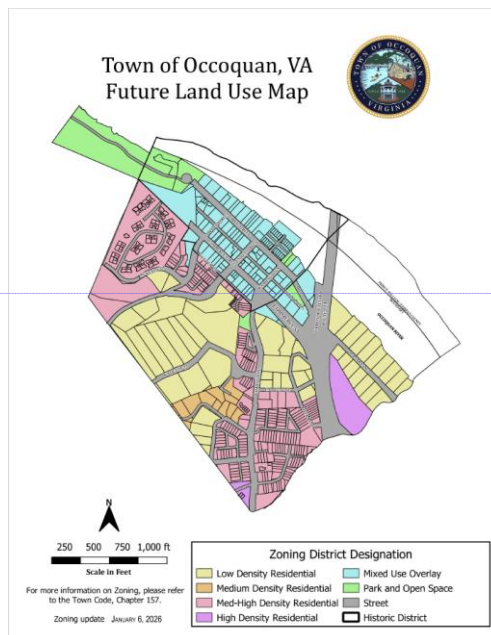
To continue to build upon and enhance partnerships with Prince William and Fairfax Counties to generate a shared border area, land use planning and zoning that reflects and advances Occoquan’s vision and desired future.

#### Our Plan for 2036

By 2036, Occoquan will have realized a number of transformative yet carefully guided improvements. The completion of the Town’s Riverwalk, combined with the implementation of the updated Community Plan which will include trail town status, will enhance connections between the waterfront and the historic commercial core, creating a cohesive, inviting environment for both residents and visitors. Thoughtful redevelopment, such as the completion of The Mill at Occoquan and other appropriately scaled private projects, will contribute to a quaint, yet vibrant and modern downtown that supports a thriving mix of businesses.

Improved and modernized zoning ordinances will help foster a diverse range of restaurants, specialty shops, and service establishments that draw visitors from across the region. The continuation of the Town’s mixed-use development model within the Historic District [along with sidewalk improvements](#) will allow residents and business owners to live and work in close proximity, strengthening the walkable, community-oriented character that defines Occoquan.

Meanwhile, the Historic District, refined to accurately reflect the Town’s original commercial and cultural core, will continue to be preserved and enhanced. Its buildings, streetscapes, and public spaces will be carefully maintained and beautified in accordance with regularly updated Architectural Review Board guidelines, ensuring that preservation efforts remain both historically authentic and responsive to contemporary needs.



Map No. 4 Future Land Use Map, 2026

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Guided by responsible planning, [and recognizing that careful coordination is required to avoid conflict or tension between plan themes](#), Occoquan in 2036 is envisioned as a beautiful, successful, and vibrant town, a community that honors its history while welcoming thoughtful growth, expanding housing opportunities in appropriate areas, and maintaining the distinctive sense of place that has long made Occoquan a premier historic waterfront destination.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# COMMUNITY CHARACTER & COMMUNITY LIFE

### Goal

To guide Occoquan's continued physical development in a way that maintains a balanced mix of residential, commercial, and public land uses, honoring the town's historic identity while embracing thoughtful modernization. This goal supports strategic growth, including appropriate increases in residential density where suitable, the evolution of mixed-use districts, and the integration of new developments such as the Mill at Occoquan. Together, these efforts will enhance the social and economic well-being of residents, merchants, and visitors, ensuring that Occoquan remains vibrant, connected, and economically resilient.

### Overview

The Town's leadership will strive to preserve Occoquan's charm and character while supporting thoughtful, forward-looking growth. This includes particular focus on the following aspects of the community:

- **Housing Development:** Residential growth will be carefully guided to maintain a balanced mix of housing options, including Affordable, Mid-Level, and Luxury, while also exploring opportunities for increased residential density in appropriate areas to support long-term vitality and economic resilience.
- **Neighborhood Preservation and Revitalization:** Existing neighborhoods will be protected where feasible, and revitalized when necessary to sustain the Town's vibrant, small-town character. Enhancements will reflect both historic identity and modern community needs.
- **Services and Facilities:** The Town will encourage and support new services, amenities, and facilities that enhance quality of life for residents and enrich the experience of visitors, consistent with Occoquan's community values.
- **Parks, Open Spaces, the Riverwalk, and Trail Town Development:** The preservation and enhancement of parks, open spaces, and waterfront areas—including the completed Riverwalk—will remain a core priority. The Town will also continue advancing its Trail Town initiative, strengthening connections to regional trail networks, improving wayfinding, and expanding recreational access. Together, these efforts will promote community enjoyment, support appropriate commercial activity, and reinforce the historic and cultural character of Occoquan.

## Housing and Housing Affordability

The Town currently includes a mix of multi-family, single-family, and mixed-use housing options distributed throughout its boundaries. This diversity should be maintained and refined in ways that support Occoquan's long-term vision. Within the Historic District, future development should prioritize mixed-use buildings that integrate residential and commercial uses while complementing the area's historic character. Outside the Historic District, the Town should carefully manage growth and limit significant intensification of existing residential areas in order to reduce pressure on local transportation networks and preserve neighborhood livability.



Figure 7 Homes and Businesses on Mill Street, 2016

~~Outside the Historic District, the Town should carefully manage growth and allow increased residential density only in targeted areas through strategic rezoning, ensuring that any such changes are balanced with investments in transportation management and the preservation of existing neighborhood character.~~

~~The Town evaluated affordable housing within the broader context of Prince William County and consistent with the intent of the Code of Virginia to encourage a variety of housing types that meet the needs of residents across income levels. Affordable housing is generally understood as housing for which total costs do not exceed approximately 30 percent of household income, and localities may address this objective through the provision of diverse housing forms and development patterns. Within its geographic and historic constraints, the Town has satisfied this policy framework by maintaining a mix of multi-family, single-family, and mixed-use residential opportunities that contribute to a range of price points and living options. While the Town's limited land area, redevelopment potential, and historic district considerations restrict large-scale expansion, the existing housing diversity supports regional affordability goals and reflects a context-sensitive approach consistent with state guidance. The Town looked at the question of housing affordability, and within the context of Prince William County, the Town has satisfied the Code of Virginia by having multi-family, single-family and mixed-use residential opportunities within the community.~~

### Recommended Action Items for Housing and housing Affordability

- i. Encourage context-sensitive mixed-use residential development within the Historic District that complements historic character.
- ii. Develop clear design and scale guidance to ensure compatibility of residential uses within historic areas.

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- iii. Limit significant residential intensification to preserve neighborhood character and reduce transportation impacts.

### Neighborhood Preservation and Revitalization

To encourage the thoughtful redevelopment of commercial areas in a way that preserves the Town's unique character of harmoniously blending residential and commercial uses, while also ensuring that property owners can pursue redevelopment that is both economically feasible and aesthetically compatible with the community.

Over the last several years, the Town has renovated and expanded the Town Dock, enhancing access for visitors arriving by water and supporting local businesses. Access to the Occoquan River by recreational cruise boats is now easier and safer. In addition, the purchase of a 17-acre parcel of woodland on the western end of Tanyard Hill has preserved the beauty and natural character of one of the Town's historic gateways. This acquisition along with regional and national bike and pedestrian trails has helped position the Town as a Trail Town, supporting multi-modal recreational transportation by providing connectivity for pedestrians, cyclists, and trail users while reinforcing the Town's commitment to outdoor amenities and sustainable access to its natural and historic resources.



Figure 8 View of Riverwalk and Town Dock, 2015

### Recommended Action Items for Neighborhood Preservation and Revitalization

- i. Develop redevelopment guidance for commercial areas that balances economic feasibility with historic and aesthetic compatibility.
- ii. Encourage adaptive reuse and mixed-use redevelopment that reinforces the Town's residential-commercial character.
- iii. Continue gateway preservation and stewardship of the Tanyard Hill parcel to protect scenic and historic viewsheds.
- iv. Expand partnerships supporting Occoquan's designation and identity as a Trail Town.

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### Community Services and Facilities

It is a priority to develop the infrastructure along the riverfront as a means of encouraging both residents and non-residents alike to make the Town a unique destination to enjoy.

In collaboration with the Gaslight Landing Condominium Association, the planned Occoquan Riverwalk is now extended upstream as far as 301 Mill Street. In 2015, Vulcan Stone Quarries Inc. generously provided truckloads of blue stone rip-rap to stabilize the river bank at Mamie Davis Park where the Town Dock meets the park.



Figure 9 View of Occoquan River toward upper and lower dams from the Footbridge, 2026

Further downstream, in 2021, Vulcan donated rip rap and VDOT refurbished the riverbank near the site of the new ADA accessible canoe, kayak, and stand-up paddleboard launch, which opened to the public in April 2021. In addition, in 2021 the Town Council granted special use permits for the one-acre property along Mill Street near River Mill Park, known as The Mill at Occoquan, which includes the planned development of a portion of the Riverwalk along the development's waterfront. This planned addition will complete approximately 30 percent of the total planned linear footage of the Riverwalk. Between 2023 and 2025, the Town Council advanced planning efforts for the Riverwalk expansion by authorizing a Riverwalk Expansion Special Committee (RESC) tasked with developing recommendations for the project. The RESC presented its final report to Town Council on May 7, 2024, positioning the project for anticipated state funding between Fall 2024 and Spring 2025. In 2025, however, the Town was informed that the expected state funding had been removed from the budget, and since that time the Town has continued to explore alternative funding opportunities to advance the Riverwalk initiative. In 2026 the Town Council reconvened the RESC with the intent to begin development of other portions of the Riverwalk.

**Recommended Action Items for Community Services and Facilities**

- i. Advance phased implementation of the Riverwalk consistent with the RESC recommendations.
- ii. Continue coordination with waterfront property owners and HOAs to secure easements or connections.
- iii. Integrate Riverwalk improvements with public access, ADA accessibility, and environmental stabilization efforts.
- iv. Maintain and enhance riverbank stabilization and water-access infrastructure in partnership with public and private stakeholders.

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**Parks, Open Space, Public Space**

The Town has prioritized the expansion and enhancement of its parks and open spaces to provide greater opportunities for recreation and to improve the overall quality of life for residents. These improvements are also intended to attract visitors from outside the Town,

reinforcing Occoquan as a premier destination for leisure and outdoor activities while supporting the community's historic and cultural character.

In 2015, the Town entered into a lease with Fairfax Water to transform the former water treatment facility site into a one-acre community park, named River Mill Park. Fairfax Water oversaw the demolition of the tanks and stabilization of the site, while the Town managed the development of the park, funded through Prince William County capital outlay. The park offers stunning views of both the lower and upper dams, vistas that had been largely inaccessible for over 50 years. Opened to the public in July 2016, River Mill Park has become a central gathering place and a focal point for the Town's community activities. The Town is responsible for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the park, ensuring it remains a safe, welcoming, and attractive space for residents and visitors alike.



Figure 10 Events in River Mill Park, 2020

River Mill Park is now the site of many community events such as concerts, community gatherings, and weddings. It also provides a beautiful natural setting for passive recreational use. Events in the park not only provide activities for residents and non-residents, but also serves as a vehicle to encourage increased foot traffic for Town businesses.

Building on its investment in community spaces, the Town began expanding a public art initiative in 2024, commissioning a mural at the Route 123 entrance to Town and another on the Town's Love sign in River Mill Park. These projects celebrate Occoquan's unique character and enhance the visual appeal of key public spaces. In 2025, the Town initiated the creation of a pocket park on an underused town property, the site of the former water pump house at 172 Mill Street. Supported by a grant from Virginia Main Street program, the project expected to be completed in 2026, includes improved landscaping, permanent seating, and the installation of a mural, creating a welcoming and attractive space that fosters engagement with public art and encourages both residents and visitors to enjoy the Town's historic and cultural assets.

As mentioned previously, the Town's purchase of the 17-acre parcel at the top of Tanyard Hill Road provides the Town the opportunity of coordinating with both Prince William County and private groups for the construction of a trail connection extending from the Tanyard Hill parcel through Lake Ridge, and on to the County Government Center. In 2021, led by Mayor Porta, a group of volunteers from the Prince William Trails and Streams Coalition constructed a natural trail on the parcel for residents and visitors to enjoy. The Town is continuing to work with Prince William County to investigate other opportunities for the parcel.

[Another Town-owned property, Furnace Branch Park located along Washington Street, remains an undeveloped natural area characterized by mature trees, a stream corridor, and limited public access. While the parcel provides environmental value, its potential as a passive](#)

recreation and connectivity asset has yet to be realized. Future improvements should focus on carefully expanding public access through the creation of trails and nature-oriented amenities, coupled with the removal of extensive invasive vegetation and targeted stream restoration efforts to enhance ecological health, improve stormwater function, and create a more inviting natural space for residents and visitors.



Figure 11 Kayak Launch Ramp completed, 2021

After many years of planning and dedicated effort led by Mayor Porta, the ADA canoe, kayak and stand up paddleboard launch opened on the south side of Town underneath the Route 123 bridge in April 2021. Largely funded through a grant from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, this is believed to be the only free, 24/7 public access ramp on the Occoquan River suitable for people with ambulatory disabilities. The ramp not only provides recreational access to the Occoquan River, but also provides access to the town for visitors arriving via non-motorized watercraft.

Recommended Action Items for •Parks, Open Space, and Public Space

- i. Maintain and program River Mill Park as a central gathering space supporting events and passive recreation.
- ii. Expand the Town’s public art initiative to additional gateways and public spaces.
- iii. Integrate water access amenities with Riverwalk expansion and tourism initiatives.
- iv. Pursue grant funding and partnerships for parks, trails, public art, and environmental restoration projects.
- v. Strengthen wayfinding and branding to reinforce Occoquan as a destination for recreation, trails, and river access.
- vi. Furnace Branch Park
  - a. Develop a conceptual plan for Furnace Branch Park emphasizing passive recreation and connectivity.
  - b. Remove invasive vegetation and implement ecological restoration strategies.
  - c. Pursue stream restoration and stormwater improvements in coordination with environmental partners.
  - d. Design and construct a low-impact trail and nature-oriented amenities to expand public access.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

# CIRCULATION AND MOBILITY

### Goal

To create and maintain a safe and efficient Town-wide mobility and transportation network that is interconnected, multi-modal and reflects a pedestrian-friendly land use pattern.

### Overview

Historically, the Town of Occoquan has benefited from the loss or absence of major transportation facilities in its immediate vicinity. This relative isolation has helped preserve the Town's historic character and small-town scale, shielding it from the strip commercial development that has transformed nearby arterial highways. As a result, the Town's street system remains consistent with its pedestrian-oriented, community-focused character.

As part of the original 1804 Town charter, a plat established a grid system of streets and lots, portions of which remain intact today, though some streets have been vacated over time. This historic grid provides a foundation for walkability, connectivity, and the integration of multi-modal transportation options.

The remaining grid street system in the Historic District is linked to surrounding neighborhoods and regional highways via several radial roads, which serve as vital conduits for the movement of people and goods. These radials including Union Street/Tanyard Hill Road, Washington Street/Occoquan Road, and Commerce Street with its connection to Route 123, function as the Town's primary access points. See below table for annual average daily traffic volumes.

**Table No. 3: Vehicles Per Day**

*VDOT Annual Average Daily Traffic Volume Estimates by Section of Route - Prince William Maintenance Area<sup>4</sup>*

Road	1986	1996	2001	2014	2020	2024	% Change
Tanyard Hill Road (Town Line - Ellicott)	N/A	N/A	4,000	4,200	3,700	5,000	35.1%
Union Street (Ellicott - Commerce)	N/A	N/A	4,000	3,700	3,500	4,600	31.4%
Union Street (Mill - Commerce)	N/A	N/A	1,200	2,500	2,900	5,500	89.7%
Washington Street (Commerce - Mill)	7,800	2,000	2,500	2,800	3,000	3,700	23.3%
Washington (Town Line - Commerce)	N/A	N/A	1,800	2,000	2,100	2,500	19.0%

<sup>4</sup> VDOT, Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) Dataset, 2024. Accessed via ArcGIS Online: [https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?url=https://services.arcgis.com/p5v98VHDX9Atv3l7/ArcGIS/rest/services/VDOT\\_Traffic\\_Volume\\_2024/FeatureServer/0](https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?url=https://services.arcgis.com/p5v98VHDX9Atv3l7/ArcGIS/rest/services/VDOT_Traffic_Volume_2024/FeatureServer/0)

Road	1986	1996	2001	2014	2020	2024	% Change
Commerce Street (123 - Washington)	7,000	6,500	4,900	5,500	5,300	5,800	9.4%
Commerce Street (Union - Ellicott)	N/A	N/A	840	740	690	850	23.2%
Commerce Street (Washington - Union)	N/A	N/A	3,500	3,200	2,500	3,400	36.0%
Mill Street (Ellicott - Dead End)	N/A	N/A	1,400	390	390	390	0.0%
Mill Street (Washington - Ellicott)	N/A	N/A	980	2,800	3,000	3,600	20.0%
Poplar Lane (Town Line - Washington)	N/A	N/A	550	560	460	500	8.7%
Ellicott Street	N/A	N/A	440	600	520	670	28.8%

It should be noted that as of 2024, the average daily traffic volume at the intersection of Rt. 123 and Commerce Street is 61,000 vehicles.<sup>5</sup>

The westerly portion of Union Street and Tanyard Hill Road outside of the Town limits is a narrow, winding road with no shoulders and restricted sight distances. According to statistics kept by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), this road carries about 4,300 vehicles per day (VPD). It is assumed that much of this traffic is composed of commuters from the Woodbridge area using the road as a short cut to/from Route 123.

According to the VDOT Annual Average Daily Traffic Volume Estimates, Washington Street carried approximately 3,700 vehicles per day (VPD) in 2024, representing a 48 percent increase from the 2,500 VPD recorded in 2001, but still a substantial decrease from the 7,800 VPD reported in the 1986 study. This long-term reduction is likely attributable to improvements along Old Bridge Road and Route 123, which have reduced the need for regional traffic to detour through the Town.

Traffic conditions elsewhere in Town have shifted in varied ways. Commerce Street between Union and Washington Streets has experienced an approximate 3 percent decrease in VPD since 2001, reflecting stabilized local traffic patterns. Conversely, Washington Street from Commerce Street to the Town line has seen a 39 percent increase, and Commerce Street from Route 123 to Washington Street has experienced an 18 percent increase in VPD between 2001 and 2020. Part of these increases likely reflect the addition of new residential development along Washington Street since 2001, including communities such as Occoquan Heights and Occoquan Reach. However, the number of vehicles indicates that many are cut through drivers since they are more than three times the total number of residents in the entire town.

<sup>5</sup> VDOT, *Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) Dataset, 2024*. Accessed via ArcGIS Online: [https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?url=https://services.arcgis.com/p5v98VHDX9Atv3l7/ArcGIS/rest/services/VDOT\\_Traffic\\_Volume\\_2024/FeatureServer/0](https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?url=https://services.arcgis.com/p5v98VHDX9Atv3l7/ArcGIS/rest/services/VDOT_Traffic_Volume_2024/FeatureServer/0)

Mill Street, from Ellicott Street to the dead end, saw a substantial decline in VPD from 1,400 in 2001 to 390 VPD in 2024. During the same time period, Mill Street from Washington to Ellicott Streets saw a 267 percent increase in VPD. This significant variation can most likely be attributed to the location of the traffic counting sensor between 2001 and 2014. With the development of the mixed-use project and increase use of River Mill Park at this end of the town, we expect to see a substantial increase in VPD on this section of Mill Street in the coming years. A request was made to VDOT on location of traffic counting sensors in 2025.

Washington Street is narrow, with a right-of-way width of approximately 30 feet, has limited sight distances, and limited opportunity for widening activities. In 2015, VDOT worked with the Town to complete a sidewalk project at West Locust Street that included the installation of a crosswalk to aid in pedestrian circulation and safety along Washington Street.

In 2022, VDOT upgraded the intersections of Mill Street and Ellicott Street, as well as Mill Street and Washington Street. These upgrades included the installation of crosswalks and ADA improvements to the sidewalks. In 2026, Prince William County is expected to upgrade the intersection at Mill Street and Union Street. Both the completed and proposed projects will improve pedestrian circulation and significantly enhance pedestrian safety along Mill Street.

Within the downtown area, the primary streets have adequate rights-of-way. One exception is Ellicott Street, which has a narrow right-of-way and is one-way from Mill to Commerce Street and from McKenzie Drive to Union Street.

The Town of Occoquan has a bustling business district, boasting many unique shops, eateries and businesses. During peak business times, traffic on all streets within the downtown area is heavy with both vehicular and pedestrian activity. In 2017, the Town contracted JMT to provide an assessment of the Town's parking and cut-through traffic. Based on the recommendations from that study the Town implemented a free timed parking district as recommended in order to support parking availability for patrons and residents of the district. The study found an average 250 to 300 cut-through vehicles per hour and recommended taking this data to VDOT to conduct a study for mitigation.

As of 2021, a STARS study is underway for improvements to Old Bridge Road/Route 123 and also for the I-95 interchange. This could lead to improvements in the near future that reduce congestion along this corridor and reduce cut-through traffic through town. In the past, improvements including the widening of Route 123 and HOV lanes on I-95 have had a significant impact on the Town, including potentially reducing commuter traffic through Town. The Town of Occoquan shares its borders with Woodbridge, a non-incorporated community within Prince William County, and Lake Ridge Parks and Recreation Association which continue to grow in population and experience development.

According to the U.S. Census, the population of Woodbridge grew from 31,941 in 2000 to 44,668 in 2020, continuing to reflect strong residential growth tied to its proximity to Washington,

D.C., Fort Belvoir, and Marine Corps Base Quantico. Woodbridge remains one of the most populous communities in Prince William County with approximately 43,443 residents based on recent American Community Survey estimates and does not include the estimated 45,007 in Lake Ridge. The population of Prince William County also increased significantly over the past decades. In 2010, the county's population was 402,002, representing a 43.2 percent increase from 2000. The 2020 Census counted 482,204 residents, and the most recent official estimate places the county at approximately 497,003 residents in 2024. In comparison, the Town of Occoquan has remained much smaller but has still seen steady growth. In 2000, Occoquan's population was 759, increasing to 934 by 2010 and 1,035 by the 2020 Census. More recent estimates suggest the Town's population reached approximately 1,089 in 2023.

Over the years, the Town has gone through some major changes particularly since the 2013 Occoquan Comprehensive Plan. The Town's industrial center has continued to evolve and now incorporates additional restaurants, as well as businesses with expanded hours of operation. New residential developments like Gaslight Landing, Occoquan Heights, and Vistas at Occoquan, and Berrywood have been completed. Rivertown Overlook is in final stages of completion as well the Parsonage and the Mill at Occoquan projects expected to begin construction in the near future expected to bring more than a 10% increase in residents.

Since the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in 2016, the Town opened River Mill Park, a one-acre waterfront park located at the west end of Mill Street at the site of the former River Station Water Treatment Plant operated by Fairfax Water since 1967. The park includes an event pavilion, a looped asphalt trail, a restroom and storage facility, and upgrades to the footbridge that crosses the Occoquan River. Since its opening, the park has become a popular gathering place for residents and visitors, the site of weddings, and hosts many town events throughout the year including concerts, movies, beer gardens, craft vendor events, trivia nights, and other special events.

Additionally, the Town has completed and opened a canoe, kayak and stand up paddleboard launch under the Route 123 bridge, providing free public ADA access to the Occoquan River.

These and future changes will continue to increase Town residents' and visitors' use of roads, parking and sidewalks.

The following are top circulation and mobility themes for the Town:

1. **Traffic:** Cut-through traffic continues to be a significant issue. A transportation/traffic management strategy that addresses cut-through traffic is needed. Alternative modes of transportation should be considered.
2. **Parking:** Parking remains a challenge downtown and in residential areas. Occoquan needs to develop a parking management study and strategy focused on downtown and adjacent surrounding areas.

3. **Sidewalks:** A pedestrian mobility management strategy is needed. Pedestrian safety should always be considered for both residents and visitors.
4. **Gateways:** A woodland buffer between Occoquan and surrounding areas should be preserved.

Based on these themes, the Town should continue planning and implementing solutions that improve circulation and mobility while preserving Occoquan’s historic character, small-town scale, and environmental resources. This work is increasingly important as recent census estimates show ongoing population growth in the surrounding region. The following goals and policies are recommended to advance these objectives.

### Traffic

Even as road improvements have occurred, cut-through traffic continues to be an issue for residents and businesses. Rise in population due to new development within the Town and elsewhere in Prince William County has added to the problem. It is expected that increasing business activity and opening of new parks will intensify traffic problems and demand on parking.

The problem of increasing commuter traffic cannot be solved by the Town alone, because the source of much of the problem is outside the Town and roadway improvements are the responsibility of the Virginia Department of Transportation and Prince William County. Increased efforts between the Town, Prince William County, and VDOT are needed to develop solutions and to plan for required improvements.

One contributing source of traffic congestion is the Town’s lack of mail delivery and the continued reliance on a post office box system for all 1,000+ residents and businesses. Occoquan is the only remaining municipality in Virginia without postal delivery service. This system was established many years ago when the Town’s population did not meet USPS thresholds for home and business delivery. Today, however, the system remains in place, and the Town’s post office – located at the corner of Mill and Washington Streets in the heart of the historic district – requires residents and business owners to visit the facility regularly. This generates both additional pedestrian activity and vehicular congestion in one of the Town’s most constrained locations. The Town should continue working with USPS to ensure that present and future mail service needs for all Occoquan residents and businesses can be adequately accommodated.

#### **Recommended Action Items Related to Traffic:**

- i. Based on the 2017 JMT *Town of Occoquan, Virginia Parking* study the Town should continue developing and implementing an enhanced street and traffic management plan to accommodate both local and commuter traffic, particularly during peak hours and holidays. The plan should protect the Town’s historic character, environmental resources, and business flow, while addressing residential concerns.

- ii. It is suggested that all Town sidewalks be 6 to 10 feet in width on each side. Within the historic district, such sidewalks shall be brick. Sidewalk improvements should prioritize pedestrian safety, ADA accessibility, and connections to the Riverwalk and other recreational trails.
- iii. As part of site plan or subdivision approval, developers should be required to improve adjacent streets to meet both VDOT standards and the specifications outlined in this Comprehensive Plan. Improvements should incorporate pedestrian, bicycle, and multi-modal design elements, including bike lanes, shared-use paths, and pedestrian-friendly crossings where appropriate.
- iv. All residential streets serving lots less than one acre in size should be constructed with curbs and gutters and with sidewalks on at least one side of the street. Where feasible, consideration should be given to bikeable streets or multi-modal connectivity to support alternative transportation options.
- v. No street right-of-way in Occoquan should be vacated until surrounding properties are fully developed or until an alternative circulation plan, including vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle access, has been endorsed by both the affected property owners and the Town Council.
- vi. The town should continue identifying opportunities to enhance multi-modal circulation, including extending connections to the Riverwalk, trail networks, and regional bicycle routes, to reduce vehicle congestion and promote sustainable transportation alternatives for residents and visitors alike.

## Parking

Maximizing the availability of parking while preserving the historic character of the Town has been an ongoing challenge. Parking congestion typically occurs during peak business hours, weekends, and holidays and has recently been compounded by an increase in both seasonal and daily short-term pickups by customers for take-out food, retail items, and flowers.

The majority of visitor parking in Town is provided via on-street spaces or in one of the Town's four municipal lots, including the lot under the Route 123 bridge. In the past, the Town partnered with private property owners to expand public parking opportunities, including the development of the Golden Plum property, which provides both on-street and off-street public spaces. The 2017 JMT *Traffic and Parking Study* recommended continuing collaboration with property owners and developers to expand parking, encouraging the use of Town-owned lots, and improving the walkability of the Town. The study also highlighted opportunities to incorporate bicycle parking to leverage Occoquan's location along a prominent regional bike route.

Parking challenges are particularly acute in the Business District. When the Town was originally laid out, there were no automobiles, and early zoning regulations did not require off-street parking for commercial properties. While the ordinance has since been amended to require off-street parking for all new development, redevelopment, or expansion, existing businesses often rely on limited on-street spaces.

Additional complications include the lack of standardized parking signage, which can create confusion for visitors and limit the efficient use of available spaces. As residential development, park activity, and business growth continue, the Town will need to implement strategies, including improved signage, expanded off-street options, and bicycle accommodations, to alleviate parking pressures while maintaining the historic ambiance of the downtown area.

**Recommended Action Items for Parking:**

- i. Develop and implement an enhanced parking management plan to optimize on-street and off-street parking in the Business District and adjacent residential areas, address visitor confusion caused by inconsistent signage, and support safe pedestrian and bicycle circulation.
- ii. Identify and acquire suitable sites for new Town-owned parking lots to increase public parking capacity close to key commercial areas.
- iii. Work with private developers and property owners to create additional public parking opportunities, including both temporary and permanent off-street spaces, especially in the Business District.
- iv. Continue to require developers to provide adequate off-street parking in accordance with the zoning ordinance and Comprehensive Plan standards, with attention to historic and environmental context.
- v. Encourage the use of privately-owned vacant land by businesses for public parking to maximize available spaces without compromising the Town’s historic character.
- vi. Integrate bicycle parking and short-term pick-up zones where appropriate to accommodate alternative transportation modes and increased visitor activity while maintaining the Town’s historic character.

**Walkways / Sidewalks**

Although automobile access to the Town is important, one of Occoquan’s defining charms is its accessibility by foot and by water. The Town has undertaken several initiatives to enhance pedestrian access and connectivity, with a focus on creating a walkable, visitor-friendly environment.

The most significant ongoing effort is the Occoquan Riverwalk, which will ultimately span the length of the Town along the river. The Riverwalk will provide a continuous path from the Canoe and Kayak Launch under the Route 123 bridge to River Mill Park at the western end of town. The most recent expansion, opened in 2015, extended the Riverwalk behind the Gaslight Landing community. In 2021, the Town Council granted special exception approvals for The Mill at Occoquan development, which will add approximately 30 percent of the Riverwalk

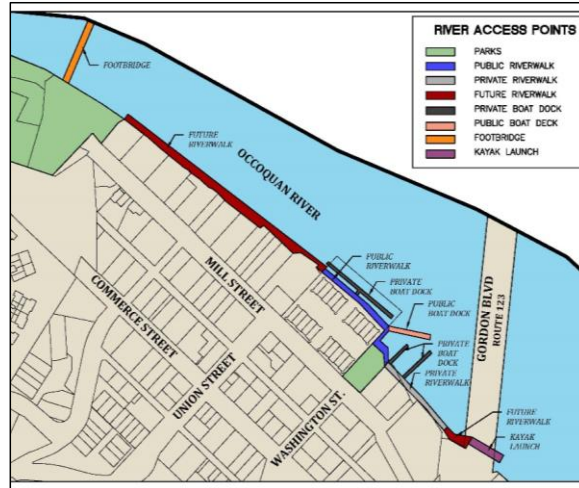
along the western end, providing a critical connection to River Mill Park and enhancing waterfront access.

In 2023 and 2024, the Town began planning additional segments of the Riverwalk and pursued state funding to advance construction. Although the anticipated funding was ultimately not received, these planning efforts established a clear framework for completing the remaining sections.

In addition to the Riverwalk, the Town is investing in improved sidewalk infrastructure to enhance pedestrian mobility throughout the community. The Union Street sidewalk project is expected to begin construction in late 2026 and will create a continuous pedestrian route from the Occoquan Greenway Trail entrance on Union Street/Tanyard Hill Road to downtown Mill Street, further linking regional trails to the Town’s core commercial and historic areas.

Through these combined efforts, Occoquan continues to strengthen its pedestrian network, supporting a walkable, safe, and vibrant community for residents and visitors alike while maintaining the Town’s historic character.

Another key element of pedestrian access to the Town is the Occoquan Foot Bridge, also known as the Nathaniel Ellicott Footbridge, which is owned and maintained by VDOT. The bridge is an integral part of the Town’s pedestrian circulation network, providing access to and from the Fairfax County side of the river and serving as a critical link in regional trails. It is particularly important during the Spring and Fall craft shows, when large numbers of visitors rely on the bridge to safely reach downtown. Without the foot bridge, pedestrians would be forced to cross the heavily traveled Route 123 bridge, which poses significant safety risks.



Map No. 5 River Access Points in Occoquan, 2021

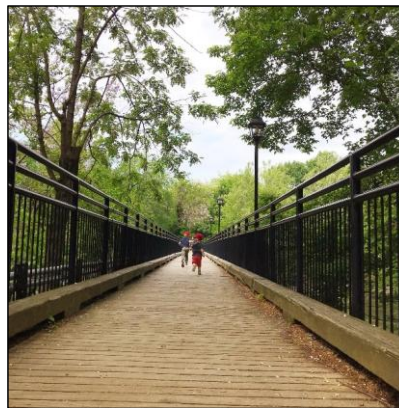
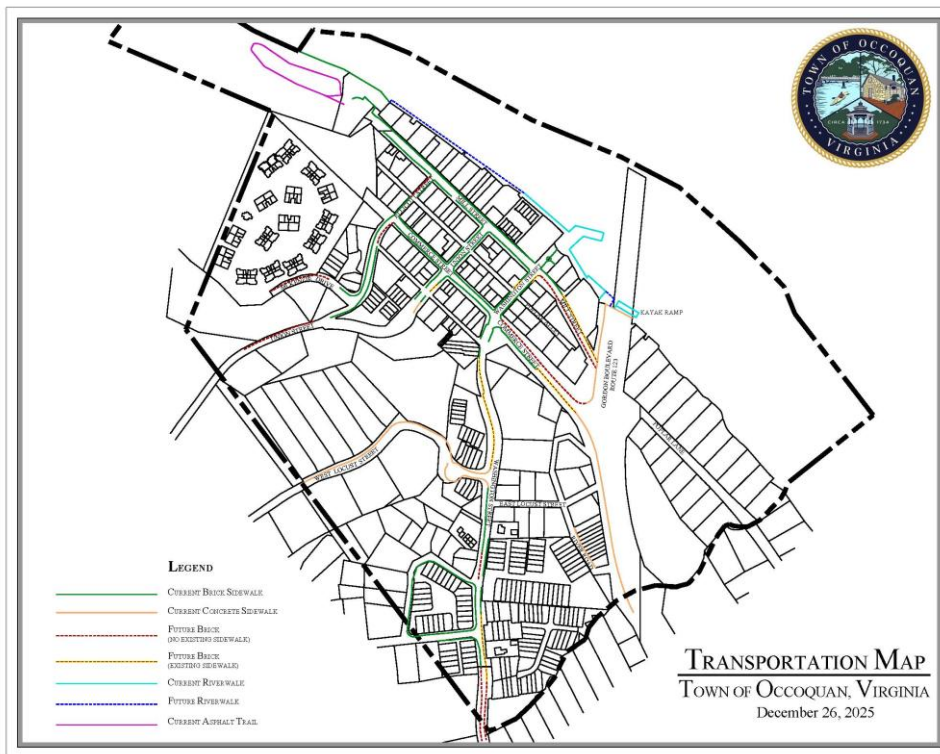


Figure 12 Nathaniel Ellicott Footbridge, 2020

As part of the construction of River Mill Park, the foot bridge was upgraded, including replacing the original chain-link fence with black railing and adding lighting for enhanced safety and aesthetics. In 2024, VDOT conducted an inspection and replaced weathered, buckling, and failing walkway timbers with new polymer-based decking.

The Town should continue to collaborate with VDOT to ensure regular inspection and maintenance of the Occoquan Foot Bridge, recognizing its vital role in pedestrian circulation, regional connectivity, and the overall accessibility of the Town.

The plan for pedestrian circulation is illustrated below on map number 6. The most significant element of the plan is for the construction of the Occoquan Riverwalk at the “rear” of lots between the Route 123 parking lot on Mill Street and River Mill Park. This walkway will make



Map No. 6 Pedestrian Circulation Map/Transportation Map, 2025

maximum use of the Town's scenic assets, open greater commercial possibilities and allow the establishment of a buffer in accordance with the intent of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act. With the planned Mill at Occoquan development completing another significant portion of the Riverwalk, the Town should continue to work with existing riverfront property owners to connect the western and eastern portions of the Riverwalk.

In the 1990s, through a grant program, the Town planned and implemented the Mill Street Enhancement Project, which improved pedestrian facilities in the Historic District by replacing aging concrete with brick and adding gas lights. Continued expansion and maintenance of brick sidewalks are recommended on all main and connecting streets of the Historic District.

Pedestrian-related improvements include lighting of crosswalks, the extension of sidewalks and the construction of pedestrian trails within the Town. The Town is also actively working on related initiatives, such as improving key intersections and installing compliant crosswalks throughout the historic district area to enhance safety, accessibility, and overall walkability.

**Recommended Action Items for Sidewalks:**

- i. Undertake a community-wide pedestrian and streetscape planning effort to identify priority locations for new sidewalks, crosswalks, and safety enhancements. This effort should evaluate intersection improvements, ADA upgrades, and design features that strengthen pedestrian circulation and reduce conflict with vehicular traffic.
- ii. Continue improving and expanding sidewalks, prioritizing brick sidewalks within the Historic District to preserve downtown's historic character and enhance pedestrian connectivity for residents, visitors, and businesses.
- iii. Advance streetscaping and walkway initiatives that support Occoquan's development as a trail town destination, including connections to the Occoquan Greenway Trail, regional bike networks, and future multi-modal routes.
- iv. Improve pedestrian and bicycle circulation facilities to reduce reliance on automobiles and promote safe, enjoyable, multi-modal travel throughout the Town.
- v. Finalize planning for the Occoquan Riverwalk and identify a sustainable funding strategy – through grants, partnerships, private development coordination, and Town resources – to complete remaining segments..
- vi. Develop and mark designated pick-up and drop-off areas for public school transportation, private shuttles, and tour services to reduce congestion and improve circulation during peak times and community events.
- vii. Create designated short-term parking or pick-up zones for retail, restaurant take-out, and other quick-turnover commercial services, reducing curbside congestion and improving safety for pedestrians in the business district.

## Gateways

Major gateways into the Town include Commerce Street, Washington Street, Mill Street, Poplar Lane, and the Tanyard Hill Road approach to Union Street. These gateways are more than simple points of entry, they are defining features of Occoquan's identity and play an essential role in conveying to residents and visitors that they are entering a historic, intimate, and distinctive community.

Each gateway presents an opportunity to strengthen the Town's character, enhance wayfinding, and establish a cohesive aesthetic for those arriving by vehicle, on foot, or by bicycle. As Occoquan continues to grow as a walkable and increasingly multi-modal destination, clear, attractive, and well-maintained gateways will be essential components of the Town's transportation network and visitor experience.

Consistent with long-standing Town policy, the Tanyard Hill Road to Union Street gateway should continue to be preserved in its natural, woodland state. This area provides one of the final remaining glimpses of the landscape early travelers would have encountered on their approach to Occoquan and remains a cherished environmental buffer between the Town and surrounding development of Lake Ridge. The Town's acquisition of the Tanyard Hill woodland tract and the Town's emerging status as a trail town reinforce the importance of retaining this rural character, both for scenic value and for the protection of natural resources.

Moving forward, gateway areas should be evaluated for enhancements such as coordinated signage, landscaping improvements, pedestrian and bicycle connections, lighting scaled to Occoquan's historic character, and wayfinding that directs visitors to parking, the Riverwalk, and the Historic District. Thoughtfully designed gateways will help ensure that every entry into Occoquan conveys a sense of welcome, history, and community pride.

### **Recommended Action Items for Gateways:**

- i. Continue safeguarding and enhancing all Town gateways, recognizing their value to community identity and business vitality. Preservation of visual character, historic context, and natural features should remain a priority as gateways communicate the Town's unique environmental and cultural heritage.
- ii. Strengthen coordination with Fairfax County and Prince William County to ensure that development decisions outside Town boundaries do not conflict with the Town's goals for its gateways. This coordination should include exploring opportunities for strategic boundary adjustments or extensions where appropriate to better protect gateway corridors and support long-range planning needs.
- iii. Develop and implement a study focused on invasive vegetation to evaluate, identify, and recommend strategies for the removal of invasive or non-indigenous plant species

in and around gateway areas. The study should also outline long-term maintenance and native restoration practices to preserve the Town's natural character.

- iv. The Town should continue to incorporate gateway improvements into the Town's Capital Improvement Program (CIP), including planning, design, and funding strategies to support phased implementation of gateway enhancements.

## Emergency Evacuation Planning

The Town of Occoquan's emergency evacuation planning is anchored by its Homeland Security and Emergency Management Unit within the Occoquan Police Department, statutory authority in Town ordinance (§34.25-§34.26), and close operational alignment with Prince William County's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). This structure ensures NIMS-based command and control, annual plan maintenance, and coordinated activation for evacuation, sheltering, and public warning across incidents ranging from floods and severe storms to dam-related emergencies.

Occoquan participates in the multi-jurisdictional Northern Virginia Hazard Mitigation Plan (NOVA HMP), which identifies flood and dam-failure risks as among the Town's highest hazards and maintains eligibility for FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance funding. Public notification is delivered through AlertOccoquan integrated with County systems to issue watches, warnings, evacuation guidance, and re-entry messaging. Dam safety and downstream evacuation readiness are further reinforced through Fairfax Water's Emergency Action Plan for the Upper and Lower Occoquan Dams and the annual Occoquan Dam Siren tests, which provide immediate alerts to seek higher ground in the unlikely event of a structural failure.

For major events such as the Occoquan RiverFest & Craft Show and the Fall Arts & Crafts Show, Town-led emergency actions include preplanned road closures, access controls, and public safety coordination to manage crowd movement and incident response.

Collectively, these plans and partnerships provide Occoquan with clear evacuation triggers, coordinated shelter operations via Prince William County and Prince William County Public Schools, robust public messaging, and ongoing resilience work that reduces the need for and improves the effectiveness of evacuations.

**Table No. 6: Emergency Plans**

Plan Name	Lead Agency	Impact/Purpose	Town Role
Northern Virginia Hazard Mitigation Plan (NOVA HMP)	Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC)	Regional risk assessment and mitigation strategies; maintains eligibility for FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMGP, FMA, BRIC) and informs evacuation/mitigation priorities	Participating locality: Occoquan specific risk profile documented in Annex 17-C and coordinated through Prince William County OEM.
Prince William County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)	Prince William County Office of Emergency Management	Countywide coordination of response, evacuation operations, and shelter/reception center activation; integrates PWCS support for sheltering and transport	Integrate Town actions with EOP; support alerts, traffic control, evacuation route management; coordinate sheltering through County and PWCS
AlertOccoquan	Town of Occoquan in partnership with Prince William County OEM	Real-time alerts and safety messaging to residents, businesses, and visitors (texts/emails/phone); used for evacuation guidance and re-entry communications	Administer local enrollment and messaging; align templates and triggers with County alerting and incident communications
Upper & Lower Occoquan Dams Emergency Action Plan (EAP)	Fairfax Water	Immediate warning and protective actions for downstream communities in the unlikely event of dam failure; annual audible siren tests for public readiness	Participating locality; coordinate evacuation to higher ground, conduct notification and traffic control; collaborate on exercises and public education
Town of Occoquan Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)	Town of Occoquan Police Department	All-hazards incident management framework for Town operations, aligned to NIMS/ICS; local/interjurisdictional emergency plans kept current and coordinated with Prince William County EOP	Lead for Town actions: plan activation, ICS structure, public warning (via AlertOccoquan), and cross-jurisdiction coordination; annual review/update per ordinance
Town of Occoquan Emergency Evacuation Plan	Town of Occoquan Police Department	Crowd safety, incident response, road closures and access control during large festivals; supports orderly movement/evacuation if needed	Lead locality; plan and execute closures, safety communications, and coordination with Prince William County public safety partners
Town of Occoquan Emergency Management Ordinance (§34.25–§34.26)	Town of Occoquan	Establishes Coordinator of Emergency Management, NIMS chain of command, and annual plan maintenance; requires close coordination with PWC EOP and VDEM	Implement and maintain Town emergency plans; ensure integration with County and Commonwealth frameworks

## CHAPTER SIX

# ECONOMIC VITALITY AND DIVERSITY

### Goal

To promote proactive and sustainable economic development and redevelopment actions in the Occoquan Business and Historic District that respect the district's unique character, balances residential density, and protects its ecological setting, while encouraging a diversity of economic activities in selected target areas of Occoquan.

### Overview

*Figure 13 Town Businesses on Mill Street, 2015*

#### **A Vibrant Town Center**

The economy of Occoquan remains strong, with continued growth reflected in meals and sales tax revenues, building and zoning activity, and other indicators of a vibrant business community. The boutiques, shops, eateries, services, and community events located within the downtown area consistently draw both tourists and local residents who are attracted by the Town's unique character and ambiance.

Meals tax and business license revenues are useful indicators of local economic health. In early 2020, the global outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to widespread business interruptions, stay-at-home orders, and restrictions on indoor dining, gatherings, and travel. Like many communities, Occoquan experienced a significant downturn in economic activity in April 2020 as businesses adjusted to the new public health environment.

Despite these challenges, local businesses adapted quickly, and the community responded with strong support. As a result, meals tax revenues for FY 2020 reached approximately \$210,000, compared to \$220,000 in FY 2019. Revenues rebounded in FY 2021, totaling approximately \$223,000, and continued to rise each year as businesses recovered, and tourism activity resumed. By FY 2025, meals tax revenues reached approximately \$313,000, illustrating both a robust post-pandemic recovery and sustained annual growth.

Self-reported sales figures on meals tax forms as well as business license applications also continue to trend upward, confirming the steady rebound in the Town's business community and tourist economy.

Another indicator of continuing growth is the increasing assessed value of taxable property within Occoquan. Prince William County assessments show the taxable base rising from \$203,322,400 in 2020 to \$286,737,200 in 2025, an increase of \$83,414,800 or 41% percent. For historical perspective, property values totaled \$75,047,800 in 2001, marking a 382% increase over the past twenty-four years.

Since the early 1990s, Occoquan has experienced significant growth across multiple dimensions, expanding its population from approximately 350 residents to approximately

1,100 today, alongside a flourishing business community and an active, engaged citizenry. Today, Occoquan continues to strengthen its position as a regional destination known for its charm, walkability, small-town character, and vibrant local economy.

### Commercial Areas

In the early 1990s, the Town Council reduced the Real Estate Tax Rate from \$0.25 per \$100 of assessed value to \$0.05 per \$100 and relied heavily on revenue generated from the semi-annual craft shows to supplement the Town’s Operating Fund. Over time, subsequent Councils recognized that this fiscal strategy did not provide the public with a clear or sustainable picture of the revenue stream required to support essential services—particularly given that approximately 24% of the Town’s total revenue depended upon four days of good weather and the availability of eager volunteers.

In response, the Town Council made a deliberate policy shift to reduce its dependence on craft show event revenue for general operating expenses. Instead, these funds are now primarily directed toward capital projects, including deferred maintenance, road and streetscaping improvements, historical and public building preservation, sidewalk and pedestrian enhancements, and other long-term, high-cost infrastructure needs. This strategic reallocation has enabled the Town to avoid incurring long-term debt while continuing to maintain and improve community facilities.

However, revenue generated from craft show events has become increasingly inconsistent each year due to factors such as unpredictable weather, declining numbers of traditional artisans as many retire, and the growing prevalence of online marketplaces that provide easier and more profitable avenues for vendors to sell their goods. Given these trends, future Town Councils may need to explore additional or alternative revenue sources to ensure continued funding for capital improvements and major infrastructure projects.



Figure 13 Occoquan Arts and Crafts Show, 2015

The majority of the Town’s Operating Fund revenue is generated through taxes, public safety fines, service fees, and business licenses, which collectively support the Town’s day-to-day services and programs. Net funds generated from the Arts and Crafts Show Events (Riverfest and Arts & Craft Show and Fall Arts & Craft Show) and other Town-hosted events are directed to the Town’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), which is reviewed and adopted annually during the budget process.

Through its Operating Fund, the Town of Occoquan provides public safety, public works, trash and recycling, stormwater management, business licensing, parks management, and other critical maintenance services. In addition to Town taxes, Occoquan residents also pay real

estate taxes to Prince William County because they benefit from the County's broader public services, including police and fire protection, public schools, health and human services, libraries, emergency management, and parks and recreation.

Economic and financial challenges for the Town primarily center on:

1. Maintaining, strengthening, and expanding a diverse mix of small businesses that make Occoquan a destination for visitors, particularly within a downtown envisioned as a walkable retail and restaurant corridor, with pedestrian-friendly streets, outdoor dining, waterfront access, boutique shopping, and local arts and cultural offerings.
2. Ensuring that Town events generate adequate, reliable revenue to support future capital projects and infrastructure needs.

### Main Street and Downtown Revitalization Efforts

To advance this vision, the Town has expanded its participation in Main Street-style revitalization strategies, focusing on placemaking, historic preservation, coordinated marketing, and enhanced walkability. These efforts aim to strengthen downtown as a vibrant, connected commercial district where residents and visitors can easily stroll between shops, dine at locally owned restaurants, enjoy the riverfront, and attend cultural and community events.

The construction of the Route 123 sound barrier wall in 2007 removed the prominent vista that once drew passerby into town. In response, Occoquan has invested in a wide range of placemaking and promotional initiatives, including:

- Public art installations at the entrance to Town from Rt. 123 and within town parks
- Improved gateway and wayfinding signage
- Enhanced streetscaping and landscaping
- Partnerships with Visit Occoquan, Discover Prince William, and regional tourism organizations
- Creation of Pocket Parks within the Town
- Expanded community programming and branding efforts led by the Town's Events and Community Development staff

The Town continues to support and promote the Arts and Crafts Show Events, which draw thousands of visitors annually, as well as newer signature events such as Holidayfest and a growing lineup hosted in River Mill Park. These include Trivia in the Park, Movies in the Park, and concerts that reinforce Occoquan as a year-round destination for both residents and visitors.

Maintaining and expanding a diverse mix of retailers that attract visitors while serving the needs of residents remains a central focus for both the Town and its business community. As the Town considers what types of businesses to encourage, it must strike a careful balance between cultivating a vibrant commercial district and preserving Occoquan's small-town

charm. To support this balance, the Town will continue evaluating programs and partnerships that offer technical assistance, business development resources, and guidance to local merchants—ensuring that small businesses have the tools and support necessary to thrive.

Main Street America (MSA) is widely recognized as one of the most effective economic revitalization frameworks in the country. While Visit Occoquan has determined that it will not move forward with pursuing formal designation for the Town as a Main Street community, the Town continues to recognize the value of the Main Street approach. The program’s four pillars of economic vitality, design, promotion, and organization provide a comprehensive framework for creating a sustainable, resilient, and economically successful downtown. Occoquan will continue to apply these principles, as appropriate, to strengthen economic vitality while preserving the Town’s historic character and identity.

When the Discover Prince William & Manassas Visitor Center closed in 2020, Prince William County installed a visitor kiosk near the Mill House Museum to maintain regional tourism support. In 2025, the Town in coordination with the Occoquan Historical Society and Visit Occoquan, opened a visitor center component within the Mill House Museum to further support regional tourism and enhance the visitor experience. The former visitor center building has since been leased for commercial use, ensuring continued activation of the space while maintaining access to public restrooms on that end of downtown.

To continue strengthening Occoquan’s economic vitality and supporting a thriving, walkable downtown, the Town must remain focused on:

- Developing and maintaining a comprehensive marketing and branding strategy that highlights the Town’s unique character, riverfront amenities, and pedestrian-friendly environment
- Developing and promoting the Riverwalk
- Developing and promoting the Town as a “trail town”
- Deepening partnerships with regional tourism and business organizations
- Advancing Main Street principles of historic preservation, promotion, and economic development

### Historic Preservation and Appearance

Many of the issues and ideas presented in this Comprehensive Plan will require additional fiscal resources. Grants and reimbursable programs for historic preservation, streetscaping, marketing, and environmental protection are available through federal, state, and county agencies; however, these opportunities often require a substantial local match. While it is unlikely that residents and businesses would support broad tax increases, targeted outreach and clear communication about the benefits of specific projects may help build support for matching funds or other limited revenue measures when necessary.

Research from Main Street America demonstrates that even modest investments in the exterior of a property can yield measurable economic impacts. Participating businesses routinely report

increased visibility and customer engagement: the majority experience a 10% increase in first-time customers, and nearly 90% report overall sales growth, with an average increase of 20%. These findings underscore the return on investment that results from strategic revitalization efforts.

As Occoquan advances its initiatives focused on historic preservation, economic vitality, design, and promotion, it is important to ensure that local preservation tools are aligned with long-term goals. The Town's current Historic District boundary extends beyond the original commercial core and includes modern residential areas that do not share the same architectural or historical characteristics or significance. Re-evaluating and adjusting the Historic District boundary would allow preservation efforts, design review, and financial incentives to be more effectively directed toward areas of true historic significance. This targeted approach ensures that limited funding, such as grant matches, façade programs, and interpretive improvements, supports the buildings and streetscapes that define Occoquan's historic identity.

As Occoquan continues strengthening its position as a regional destination, the Town's walkability, historic charm, and riverfront access remain central to its economic development and tourism strategy. The growing network of regional and national cycling routes, combined with a rising interest in outdoor recreation across Northern Virginia, places Occoquan in a unique position to capture new visitor traffic arriving by foot, bike, and water. These recreational connections complement ongoing revitalization efforts and reinforce the Town's longstanding role as a welcoming stop for travelers moving through the region.

Building on this momentum, the Town should pursue a formal "trail town" designation. With multiple cycling routes linking Occoquan to surrounding attractions, its prime location along the Occoquan River water trail, and its emerging position as the destination end of the Occoquan Greenway, the Town already serves as a focal point for outdoor recreational activity. This modern role echoes Occoquan's historic function as a waypoint for those crossing the old bridge and pausing to patronize local businesses, demonstrating that Occoquan is, and has long been, a Trail Town.

Pursuing this designation would include integrating Occoquan's trail-oriented identity into Town programs and marketing efforts; expanding amenities and wayfinding for cyclists, paddlers, and hikers; coordinating with regional partners to elevate the Town's visibility within the broader trail network; and encouraging travelers to stop, explore, and support local businesses as they move between regional destinations. Strengthening this identity will enhance tourism, support economic vitality, and reinforce Occoquan's role as a vibrant hub for outdoor recreation.

Previous Comprehensive Plans recommended identifying opportunities to rehabilitate or interpret historically significant early buildings that shaped Occoquan's mercantile origins. Going forward, the Town should continue to pursue grants and other funding opportunities to expand, protect, and enhance major historic landmarks, including the Mill House Museum/Merchant's Mill, Rockledge Mansion, and other historic structures within the true

commercial core. Continued investment in the Occoquan Riverwalk is also essential, as this project reconnects the Town to its river-oriented origins and strengthens its identity as a walkable, historic riverfront community.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

### Goal

To provide for the harmonious and sustainable use of land that meets the present and future needs of Occoquan, while protecting natural resources, enhancing environmental quality, and supporting the Town's unique historic and community character.

### Overview and Vision

The Virginia Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act requires the Town to establish a long-range vision focused on protecting and improving the ecological health of its creeks, streams, and the Occoquan River, as well as the natural habitats of the Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River that are influenced by these tributaries. The Act further mandates that the Town develop goals, policies, and implementation strategies based on a comprehensive inventory and analysis of local environmental conditions. These requirements help ensure that as Occoquan continues to grow and evolve, development decisions are informed by sound environmental stewardship and a commitment to long-term sustainability.

In response, the Town of Occoquan is committed to the following principles, which guide its environmental planning and programmatic efforts:

- Avoidance of development on sensitive natural features such as steep slopes, riparian buffers, and unstable soils to minimize erosion, protect water quality, and preserve natural landscapes.
- Reduction of nonpoint sources of pollution by managing stormwater runoff and limiting the impacts of impervious surfaces, particularly in areas adjacent to the Occoquan River, creeks, and perennial streams.
- Implementing programs in public education, wildlife habitat preservation, and pollution prevention to increase community awareness, enhance biodiversity, and promote responsible stewardship.
- Enforcing existing environmental ordinances, including the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance and related zoning and stormwater regulations, to ensure consistent protection of natural resources.
- Protecting all perennial streams in accordance with Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area designations, maintaining required Resource Protection Areas (RPAs), and safeguarding water quality through ongoing evaluation of buffer conditions.
- Developing, updating, and enforcing additional management regulations as needed to address emerging environmental challenges, incorporate best practices, and support the Town's broader sustainability goals.

Together, these principles reflect Occoquan’s commitment to balancing community growth with the preservation of the Town’s unique natural environment, ensuring healthy waterways, resilient habitats, and a high quality of life for residents, businesses, and visitors.

### Chesapeake Bay and the River Connection

All waterways within the Town of Occoquan, including creeks, drainage ditches, storm drains, and culverts, are interconnected components of the larger Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. Land use decisions made within the Town directly influence the health of these local waterways and, ultimately, the condition of the Chesapeake Bay itself. As development has intensified throughout the watershed over the past several decades, the Bay has experienced significant declines in water quality and habitat health.

This regional growth has contributed to the degradation of aquatic ecosystems, leading once-plentiful species such as sturgeon, striped bass, oysters, blue crabs, and numerous waterfowl to fall to critically low population levels. Likewise, submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), which provides essential food and habitat and helps stabilize underwater environments, experienced sharp declines beginning in the 1960s and 1970s due to increased pollution, stormwater runoff, and sedimentation associated with widespread development.

Understanding these impacts underscores the importance of thoughtful, environmentally responsible land use within Occoquan. Protecting the Town’s waterways is not only vital to local quality of life but also contributes to the recovery and long-term resilience of the entire Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The Chesapeake Bay Program was established in 1983 through a multi-state agreement among the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia to coordinate restoration and protection of the Bay and its watershed. Since then, additional Chesapeake Bay Agreements have expanded participation and strengthened regional commitments to water quality and habitat improvement. In Virginia, the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act was enacted in 1988 to implement state and local land use measures that support these goals. The Town of Occoquan is one of the 84 Virginia localities subject to the Act, which requires local policies, comprehensive plans, and ordinances to protect water quality and manage land use within Chesapeake Bay Preservation Areas.

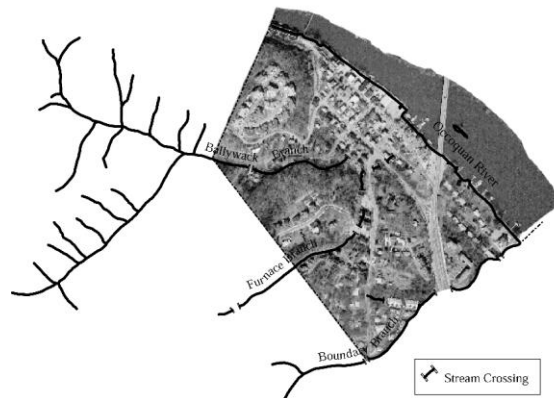
The Town implemented the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act through its Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance, which was originally adopted in June 1991 and currently found in Occoquan Town Code § 157.150. Under the Act (Code of Virginia § 62.1-44.15:67 et seq.), localities within the Chesapeake Bay watershed are required to adopt land use measures and policies that protect water quality and support Bay restoration objectives. Corresponding state regulations require that local comprehensive plans incorporate water quality protection by establishing goals, policies, and action strategies based on an inventory and analysis of local environmental conditions. These provisions serve as a guide as the Town continues to grow and develop.

Consistent with this mandate, it is the intent of the Town to:

- Restore impaired streams within its boundaries that are capable of supporting diverse aquatic habitats and recreational opportunities;
- Protect streams and riparian areas that currently support aquatic life and water quality from the adverse effects of improper development, stormwater runoff, and other sources of pollution; and
- Provide residents and visitors with opportunities to interact with and become stewards of the natural environment, fostering greater community engagement in water quality and habitat conservation.

These commitments reinforce Occoquan’s long-term environmental vision and align with regional efforts to improve the health of the Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River watershed.

Before establishing water quality goals, policies, and action plans, it is essential to develop a comprehensive understanding of the Town’s natural environment and the existing programs and regulations that protect local waterways. Collecting and evaluating this background information ensures that land use and environmental decisions are grounded in accurate data and sound scientific principles.



Map No. 7 Town of Occoquan Streams

The following sections provide an information base describing the Town of Occoquan’s natural features, watershed characteristics, and regulatory framework. This foundation will guide policy development and help ensure that future land use decisions support long-term water quality protection and sustainable community growth.

#### *Water Quality, Drainage and Stormwater Management*

The purpose of incorporating water quality protection into the Town’s Comprehensive Plan is twofold: to recognize and build upon the measures already in place to safeguard local waterways, and to establish a framework that guides future land use decisions in a way that further minimizes negative impacts on water quality. By strengthening these efforts at the local level, the Town not only protects its own creeks and streams but also contributes to the overall health of the Chesapeake Bay.

Building on this framework, it is important to recognize that water pollution generated in urban environments can be significantly reduced by applying four core principles:

- minimizing the amount of impervious surface needed to support a given land use;
- preserving existing vegetation to the greatest extent practicable during development;
- influencing human behavior through public education to reduce activities that contribute to pollution; and
- controlling the pollution that cannot be prevented through behavioral change by using technology or installing stormwater management facilities – commonly referred to as best management practices (BMPs).

Although much of Occoquan has been urbanized for decades, meaningful opportunities remain for the Town to reduce pollution and enhance water quality. By ensuring that new development is designed with water quality and habitat protection in mind, retrofitting older areas with modern stormwater controls when feasible, and equipping residents and businesses with the knowledge and tools needed to act as environmental stewards, the Town can make substantial contributions to protecting its waterways, and, ultimately, the health of the Chesapeake Bay.

Since 2023, the Town has also participated in voluntary water quality monitoring of the Occoquan River in partnership with the Potomac Riverkeeper Network. Through this program, weekly testing during the recreational season has consistently shown that the River meets safety standards for primary contact recreation, reinforcing that Occoquan’s waterfront is a healthy and well-maintained natural asset. This partnership not only provides valuable data but also helps raise public awareness about local water conditions and the importance of ongoing stewardship.

The Town should continue to collaborate with the Potomac Riverkeeper Network to support water quality monitoring, community education, and initiatives that promote resilient river systems. Strengthening this partnership will help ensure that the Occoquan River remains clean, safe, and ecologically robust, while empowering residents and visitors to engage in and support long-term watershed protection efforts.

*Sensitive Natural Resources and Constraints to Development*

Much of the water quality degradation within the Chesapeake Bay watershed can be traced to development on, or the disturbance of, environmentally sensitive land resources. When these areas are improperly managed during construction or land alteration, they can significantly impair water quality both within Occoquan and downstream. Mature vegetation, wetlands, forested areas, and other natural habitats play a critical role in filtering pollutants generated from natural processes and human activity; therefore, their protection is essential.

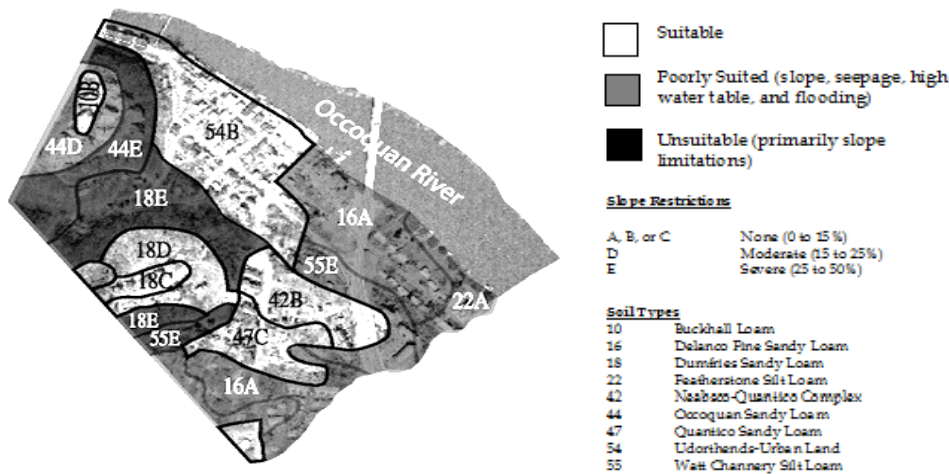
Within the Town of Occoquan, sensitive natural resources include soils with high erosion potential, steep slopes, floodplains, and forested habitat corridors. These landscapes help stabilize soils, slow stormwater runoff, support biodiversity, and protect the health of local waterways.

While the Town is committed to fostering a community that continues to grow, develop, and remain economically vibrant, it must also carefully consider environmental constraints to avoid degrading its creeks, the Occoquan River, and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay. Thoughtful land use planning, adherence to environmental regulations, and the preservation of natural resources are essential to achieving a balance between growth and long-term ecological stewardship.

Most of the Town’s floodplain has been developed for many decades, serving as the interface between the community and the Occoquan River. This historic pattern of development has not been without consequences. Periods of significant rainfall have resulted in flooding and property damage along the Town’s waterfront areas, highlighting the continuing vulnerability of development within these zones. The official floodplain—defined as the 100-year flood level—is shown on the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs). To mitigate risk and protect public safety, development within the floodplain is regulated through the Town’s Floodplain Management Ordinance, which establishes standards to reduce hazards, limit adverse environmental impacts, and promote resilient redevelopment where appropriate.

The erosion potential of soils within the Town—driven largely by soil structure and slope—is the primary soil limitation affecting development. Approximately 41% of the Town has only *slight* erosion potential, while 10% has *moderate* erosion potential. The remaining 49% of the Town is characterized by *severe* erosion potential.

Steep slopes, defined as those greater than 20%, present significant development constraints. Roughly 27% of the Town’s land area contains slopes between 25–50%, which are considered severe. Another 15% consists of moderate slopes ranging from 15–25% and may require special engineering measures for safe development. Approximately 58% of the Town has no slope



Map No. 8 Natural Constraints to Development

restrictions (0–15%), and these areas are most suitable for concentrated development activity. The Town enacted Section 157.159(b)(8) which prohibits the clearing, land disturbance, or development exceeding 500 square feet on slopes 20% or greater to address erosion. Artificial shoreline stabilization—primarily bulkheads—is present along portions of the Town’s waterfront. According to the *Tidal Shoreline Erosion in Northern Virginia* report (NVRC, 1992), certain areas along the Occoquan River have experienced moderate (less than 3 feet per year) to severe (greater than 3 feet per year) erosion. The report further notes that shorelines in some low-lying areas have shifted over time due to changes in marsh and beach formations. Additional study may be warranted to further assess the vulnerability of the Town’s shorelines and streambanks to ongoing erosion.

**Table No. 7: Soil Characteristics**

Soil	Slope	Flooding Frequency	Runoff Class	Depth to Water Table (inches)	Natural Drainage Class	Depth to restrictive feature
Buckhall Loam (10B)	2-7%	None	Medium	80+	Well drained	80+
Delanco Fine Sandy Loam (16A)	0-4%	None	Medium	12-30	Moderately well drained	80+
Dumfries Sandy Loam (18C)	7-15%	None	Low	80+	Well drained	80+
Dumfries Sandy Loam (18 D)	15-25%	None	Medium	80+	Well drained	80+
Dumfries Sandy (18 E)	25-50%	None	Medium	80+	Well drained	80+
Soil	Slope	Flooding Frequency	Runoff Class	Depth to Water Table (inches)	Natural Drainage Class	Depth to restrictive feature
Featherstone Silt Loam (22A)	0-1%	Frequent	Low	≤0	Very poorly drained	80+
Neabsco-Quantico Complex (42 B)	2-7%	None	Very high	12-30	Moderately well drained	14-30 to fragipan
Occoquan Sandy Loam (44D)	7-25%	None	Low	80+	Well drained	40-60 to paralithic bedrock
Occoquan Sandy Loam (44E)	25-50%	None	Medium	80+	Well drained	40-60 to paralithic bedrock
Quantico Sandy Loam (47C)	7-15%	None	Medium	80+	Well drained	80+
Udorthends- Urban Land (54B)	0-7%	unavailable	unavailable	unavailable	unavailable	unavailable

Watt Channery Silt Loam (55E)	25-50%	None	High	80+	Somewhat excessively drained	20-40 to paralithic bedrock
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Source: Soil Survey, Natural Resources Conservation Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Available online at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/>.

The town’s Subdivision Ordinance requires connection to the public sewer system and septic tanks are not permitted.

Within the Occoquan area, forested areas, stream buffers, and wildlife habitat corridors are quickly disappearing. Approximately one quarter (25%) of the Town’s land area is still covered by woodlands. Much of the woodland area is located in the western portion of the Town in steep terrain areas that are unsuitable for development. The Ballywhack Branch drainage area is located within the west of the Town and remains largely forested. Additionally, stream buffers still exist around Ballywhack and Boundary Branch. These areas are essential for the protection of water quality and aquatic habitats. Land use decisions must consider the need to preserve them to prevent further degradation to water quality.

Furnace Branch Park located along Washington Street is a stream buffer containing steep slopes and is covered by woodland. The park is currently zoned as R-1 and it is recommended that it should be rezoned to PPU to protect the buffer zone and environment.

***Existing and Potential Sources of Pollution***

Pollution can come from a variety of sources and can have many different impacts such as surface and groundwater contamination, poor air quality, and aesthetic degradation of the landscape. The quality of water running in local streams and rivers is one of the most important indicators of the health of a watershed. Protecting the quality of surface water is a major challenge faced by many urbanized localities. While a certain level of pollution from development, transportation, and commercial and industrial activities is inevitable, pollution must be minimized to protect against environmental health hazards and preserve the ecological balance.

Due to the Town’s relatively small size and absence of major industry, existing and potential sources of pollution are easier to identify. Much of these pollutants are characterized as nonpoint source pollutants which are generated from many diffuse sources. Nonpoint source pollution results from stormwater runoff which picks up and carries pollutants that collect on impervious surfaces such as roadways, sidewalks, and rooftops into waterways. These impervious surfaces prevent stormwater from soaking into the ground. Land development often increases the amount of impervious surface, resulting in increased stormwater runoff and often increased pollution to waterways.

Since the Town of Occoquan lies within the Occoquan Watershed which drains to the Potomac and eventually the Chesapeake Bay, minimizing nonpoint source pollution is an important initiative. Nonpoint source pollution within the Town most commonly results from residential activities, commercial activities and parking areas, waterfront activities, and atmospheric

deposition. Nonpoint source pollution within Occoquan can be reduced by minimizing impervious areas of a development site, maintaining open space, preserving indigenous vegetation, and utilizing Best Management Practices (BMPs) designed to reduce stormwater runoff and filter out phosphorus, sediment and other harmful pollutants. Public education and outreach initiatives can also be utilized to help inform residents and businesses about how their activities may impact nonpoint source pollution and surface water quality. Increasing public awareness can help citizens take actions to reduce their impacts. The Town's Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance and Erosion and Sediment Ordinance set forth performance standards aimed at reducing nonpoint source pollution and protecting water quality and delineated preservation areas.

### *Fisheries*

The Occoquan River is a significant natural resource for the Town, providing recreational opportunities, important environmental benefits, and contributing to the overall scenic and aesthetic character of the community. While there are limited informal locations where residents access the river for fishing, the Town does not currently have any designated public or commercial fishing areas. In 2025, the Town piloted an invasive species fishing event along the Occoquan River that drew over a hundred people and was well received.

It is recommended that the Town evaluate opportunities to expand safe and environmentally responsible public fishing access along the river, in coordination with applicable state agencies and environmental protection requirements, to enhance recreational use while preserving the river's ecological integrity.

## **Environmental Programs and Regulations**

In response to State and Federal mandates the Town has adopted and implemented a number of ordinances designed to protect and preserve both the local natural environment, particularly the identified sensitive natural resources, and the larger Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

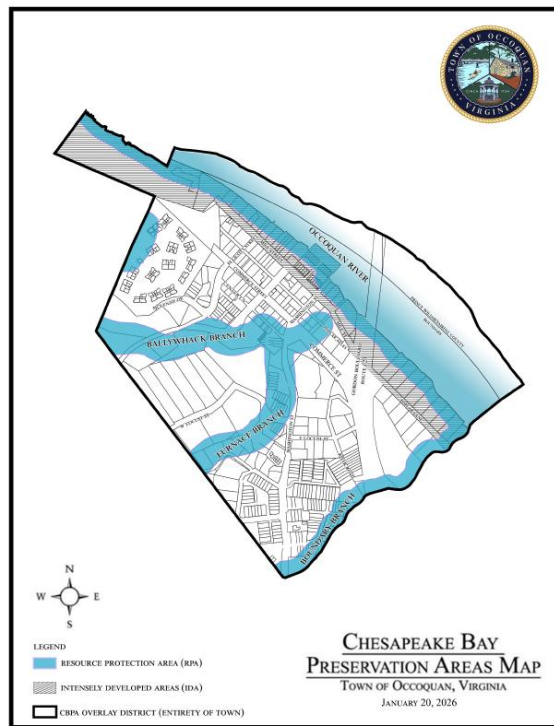
### *Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance*

The Occoquan River is an integral natural resource of the Town, providing critical habitat for aquatic life as well as recreational and aesthetic benefits. The river's listing as impaired for fecal coliform and estuarine bioassessments, along with the potential for further degradation if land-use and development activities are not properly managed, represents a primary environmental challenge recognized by the Town. The Occoquan River ultimately flows into the Potomac River and drains to the Chesapeake Bay.

In response to these regional water-quality concerns, the Commonwealth of Virginia requires all localities within Tidewater Virginia to designate Chesapeake Bay Preservation Areas (CBPAs), within which land uses are restricted or managed and water-quality protection measures are implemented to prevent degradation of the Chesapeake Bay and other waters of the Commonwealth from runoff-related pollution. In accordance with this requirement, Chesapeake Bay Preservation Areas have been mapped within the Town of Occoquan.

These mapped areas include Resource Protection Areas (RPAs) and Resource Management Areas (RMAs), which were delineated based on a natural resource inventory incorporating a review of U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) topographic quadrangles, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetlands Inventory maps, U.S. Soil Conservation Service soil surveys, and other relevant technical resources.

The Town's Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance implements the Virginia Chesapeake Bay Act and is intended to prevent any increase in nonpoint source pollution from new development and to achieve at least a ten percent reduction in nonpoint source pollution associated with redevelopment. The ordinance establishes regulatory standards to protect designated RPAs and RMAs, including the preservation of a 100-foot vegetated buffer along all RPA features and tributary streams. Where such buffers do not currently exist or are in poor condition, reestablishment may be required.



Map No. 9 Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area

Buffer requirements are modified within areas designated by the Town as Intensely Developed Areas (IDAs), recognizing the practical limitations of restoring full buffer widths in areas characterized by existing development patterns. Within the Town of Occoquan, IDAs include all areas located north of Mill Street and Poplar Lane.

Resource Protection Areas (RPAs) consist of lands at or near shorelines that provide essential ecological and biological functions that support water quality or are particularly sensitive to disturbance that may result in significant degradation of state waters. Within the Town of Occoquan, RPAs include tidal wetlands; nontidal wetlands that are contiguous to tidal wetlands or tributary streams and connected by surface flow; tidal shorelines; and a 100-foot vegetated buffer located adjacent to and landward of these features and along both sides of any water body with perennial flow, as regulated under the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance.

In practical terms, the Town's RPAs include a 100-foot buffer landward of the Occoquan River shoreline; buffer areas along Ballywhack Branch, Furnace Branch, and Boundary Branch; and a small area in the northwest portion of the Town between Commerce Street and the western terminus of Ballywhack Branch.

Resource Management Areas (RMAs) include lands which, if improperly developed, have the potential to cause significant degradation of water quality or to diminish the functional value of adjacent RPAs. In the Town of Occoquan, all lands not designated as RPAs or Intensely Developed Areas (IDAs) are classified as RMAs. This designation reflects the Town's hydrologic conditions, under which stormwater runoff from development is conveyed directly into natural or man-made channels and ultimately discharged into the Occoquan River.

Development and redevelopment activities within RMAs are subject to performance criteria intended to minimize adverse impacts on water quality. These criteria establish policy guidance for Town decision-making related to rezonings, subdivisions, and land-use approvals within both RMAs and RPAs. Key performance standards include preventing an increase in nonpoint source pollution from new development based on a Town-wide average, achieving a minimum ten percent reduction in nonpoint source pollution associated with redevelopment, minimizing land disturbance, maximizing the preservation of indigenous vegetation, and limiting impervious surface coverage to the minimum necessary to support the intended land use.

Urban water-quality issues are inherently complex and require a comprehensive watershed-management approach that incorporates both structural best management practices (BMPs), such as stormwater control facilities, and nonstructural measures, including stream buffer protection, land-use planning, and public education. In support of the goals of this chapter, the Town recognizes the importance of minimizing water-quality impacts associated with land use and development and has adopted a series of implementation policies, which are further detailed in Chapter 9.

#### *Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance*

The Town's Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance (E&S Ordinance) implements the Virginia Erosion and Sediment Control Law and supports the objectives of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act. The ordinance is intended to conserve land, water, and other natural resources within the Town by establishing standards to prevent and control erosion and sedimentation resulting from land-disturbing activities.

In furtherance of these goals, the E&S Ordinance requires that proposed land-disturbing activities exceeding 2,500 square feet within designated Chesapeake Bay Preservation Areas submit an erosion and sediment control plan for review and approval by the Town prior to the commencement of such activities.

### *Floodplain Management Ordinance*

The Town's Floodplain Management Ordinance establishes floodplain districts and regulates uses, activities, and development within areas subject to flood hazards. The ordinance applies to all lands identified as being subject to inundation by the one-hundred-year flood, the flood having a one percent annual chance of occurrence, although such a flood may occur in any given year.

Floodplain management districts delineated in the ordinance include:

- **Floodway District:** That portion of the floodplain capable of conveying the waters of the one-hundred-year flood without increasing the water surface elevation by more than one foot at any point;
- **Flood-Fringe District:** The area of the one-hundred-year floodplain outside the Floodway District but within the limits of the one-percent annual chance floodplain.

The delineation of these districts is based upon the Flood Insurance Study (FIS) for the Town of Occoquan prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the associated Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) dated January 5, 1995. FEMA prepared revised flood hazard mapping, with a preliminary Flood Insurance Rate Map dated September 30, 2020; modifications to this mapping may become effective following adoption by the Town and FEMA in accordance with the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) process.

The primary purpose of the Floodplain Management Ordinance is to protect life and property, minimize health and safety hazards, reduce the disruption of commerce and government services, avoid extraordinary public expenditures for flood protection and relief, and protect the tax base by:

- Regulating uses, activities, and development that, alone or in combination with other existing or planned development, would result in unacceptable increases in flood elevations, velocities, or frequencies;
- Restricting or prohibiting certain uses, activities, and development within flood-prone areas;
- Requiring that permitted uses, activities, and development occurring within floodplain districts be appropriately protected and/or floodproofed against inundation and flood damage.

Appropriate floodplain management also promotes environmental stewardship by minimizing alterations to natural floodplain functions, reducing erosion and sedimentation, and protecting water quality and aquatic habitat.

Uses, activities, and development in a floodplain district are permitted only upon issuance of a special permit in accordance with the procedures and standards in Chapter 14 of the Town Code. For proposed development within a Floodway District or Flood-Fringe District, the applicant must submit a detailed hydrologic and hydraulic analysis demonstrating that the

project will not result in increased flood risk to other properties. This requirement helps prevent significant alterations to the floodplain that could degrade water quality, disrupt ecological processes, or increase downstream flood hazards.

Additional requirements for development within floodplain districts vary based on whether the site is located in the Floodway District or Flood-Fringe District, and may include elevation or floodproofing standards, restrictions on fill, and limits on the placement of structures. The Floodplain Management Ordinance also specifies design criteria for sanitary sewer, water, drainage, and other utility facilities to ensure that potential water pollution or unsanitary conditions during flood events are minimized.

#### *Site Plan Ordinance and Subdivision Ordinance*

The Town's Site Plan Ordinance (Chapter 155 of the Town Code) and Subdivision Ordinance (Chapter 156 of the Town Code) include provisions intended to protect environmental resources and to prevent development on lands with physical or environmental characteristics that are unsuitable for the proposed use. Together, these ordinances establish development standards that guide the location, design, and intensity of land development to minimize adverse impacts on natural systems and public infrastructure.

The Subdivision Ordinance specifically requires that public sanitary sewer facilities be extended by the subdivider to serve all lots within a subdivision and prohibits the use of septic systems (§ 156.068(E)). This requirement reflects the Town's commitment to protecting water quality and ensuring that development is supported by adequate public utilities.

#### *Public Education Programs*

While the Town does not directly administer environmentally focused education or outreach programs, Town residents have access to a variety of environmental stewardship resources through the Prince William Cooperative Extension (PWCE) and the Prince William Soil and Water Conservation District (PWSWCD). As residents of Prince William County, Town citizens are eligible to participate in these programs and utilize the associated educational materials and technical assistance.

The PWCE offers educational opportunities through field days, seminars, demonstration lawns, and individualized assistance provided by trained Master Gardener volunteers. In recent years, the PWCE has implemented a water-quality education program focused on reducing the excessive use of lawn fertilizers and pesticides by promoting proper lawn-care and nutrient-management practices. Increased utilization of this program by Town residents has the potential to reduce nonpoint source pollution associated with residential yard maintenance and to support the Town's broader water-quality protection goals.

The PWSWCD provides additional services that support environmental conservation, including public education initiatives, ecology and watershed workshops, and technical assistance for reforestation, erosion control, and conservation projects. These programs offer

opportunities for Town residents to engage in practices that enhance soil health, protect waterways, and improve habitat quality.

In addition to these regional resources, the Town has begun to evaluate strategies for addressing the impacts of both plant and animal invasive species within its boundaries. As part of this effort, the Town has implemented regular invasive species cleanup activities on public lands, focusing on the removal of invasive vegetation and the restoration of native plant species where feasible. These initiatives reflect a growing commitment to proactive environmental management and community engagement, and they complement existing educational and conservation programs by promoting ecological resilience and long-term environmental health.

### Flood Protection and Stormwater Improvements

The Town of Occoquan experiences periodic flooding resulting from both riverine and stormwater-driven sources. Flooding associated with the Occoquan River typically occurs during spring snowmelt and rainfall events upstream, as well as during fall hurricanes or tropical storms that generate tidal surges. These events occur with some regularity, generally every one to two years, and primarily affect riverfront properties. While the intensity of river-based flooding varies, impacts are usually limited in extent and rarely reach Mill Street, the Town's principal roadway through the historic district. River flooding is relatively predictable, and coordination with weather forecasting and river-level monitoring—particularly through Fairfax Water Authority's operation of the Occoquan High and Low Dams—generally provides adequate advance notice for precautionary measures.

A more significant and less predictable flood risk is associated with flash flooding from tributary streams, most notably Ballywhack Creek and Boundary Branch. These streams originate outside Town boundaries and drain large, heavily developed watersheds beyond the Town's regulatory control. As a result, inland areas of the Town are vulnerable to rapid runoff events that threaten private property, public safety, transportation corridors, and the integrity of the Town's aging stormwater infrastructure. Due to its geographic position at the base of surrounding hillsides and at the confluence of multiple drainage systems, the Town functions as a downstream recipient of substantial stormwater flows, sediment, and debris generated by upstream development.

#### *Measures Implemented to Date*

Following significant flash flooding associated with Tropical Storm Lee in 2011, the Town initiated a coordinated, multi-jurisdictional approach to address stormwater and flood-related impacts, particularly those associated with Ballywhack Creek. Actions taken by the Town, Prince William County, and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) have included infrastructure inspections and debris removal, upgrades to stormwater management facilities outside Town boundaries, improved maintenance of culverts and debris catchers, roadway drainage improvements and stormwater pipe replacement on Commerce and Union Streets. The Town has also acquired and preserved strategically located undeveloped land through conservation easements to prevent additional runoff from future development.

In recent years, additional investments and partnerships have further reduced localized flooding risks. These include sediment removal and stormwater system cleaning funded through state assistance, as well as County-funded improvements associated with the Occoquan Greenway Trail project, which includes curb-and-gutter infrastructure designed to reduce roadway runoff entering the Town. Collectively, these measures are expected to substantially reduce flooding impacts from Ballywhack Creek under all but the most extreme conditions.

The Town has also worked collaboratively with Prince William County and VDOT to address erosion and flooding concerns associated with Boundary Branch, particularly where it intersects Mill Cross Lane and Poplar Lane. These locations present complex challenges due to jurisdictional boundaries, infrastructure constraints, and utility crossings.

#### ***Stormwater Infrastructure Assessment and Planning***

The Town's stormwater system consists largely of legacy infrastructure installed over many decades, often without comprehensive documentation or consistent design standards. A limited County-led assessment in 2018 identified deficiencies including deteriorating materials, design constraints, and private encroachments, underscoring the need for a more comprehensive understanding of system conditions.

Recognizing this need, the Town secured a Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Community Flood Preparedness Fund (CFPF) grant in 2023 to complete a Flood Resilience Assessment. This assessment produced a detailed evaluation of the Town's stormwater and flood management system, comprehensive GIS mapping of stormwater infrastructure and best management practices, and prioritized recommendations for both gray and green stormwater improvement projects. The study closed critical knowledge gaps and provided a technical foundation for future capital investment and long-term system planning. Notably, the study concluded that the Town's stormwater system has sufficient capacity to address one-hundred-year flood events.

#### ***Funding, Partnerships, and Future Direction***

Unlike other municipalities in Prince William County, the Town does not participate in the County's stormwater management utility, a decision made in the 1990s that now limits available funding and maintenance options. Given the condition of the Town's legacy infrastructure and the financial implications of retroactive participation, integration into the County system remains impractical at this time. As a result, the Town continues to pursue alternative funding sources and partnerships to address stormwater and flood resilience challenges.

In 2024, the Town was notified of a \$920,000 appropriation through the federal Community Project Funding Program to advance stormwater and flood mitigation efforts. The objectives of this investment include substantially reducing flash flooding from tributary streams,

improving water quality in the Occoquan and Potomac Rivers by reducing sediment and debris transport, and enhancing system integration and long-term operability.

Through continued coordination with County, State, and Federal partners, the Town's long-term goal is to establish an environmentally responsible and resilient stormwater management system capable of addressing routine storm events, improving water quality, and supporting sustainable maintenance, either independently or in coordination with regional systems, while protecting public safety, private property, and the Town's historic character.

### Trees and Landscaping

Remaining forested areas, stream buffers, and wildlife habitat corridors within and surrounding the Town of Occoquan are increasingly limited due to regional development pressures. The preservation of these natural features is essential to protecting water quality, maintaining aquatic and terrestrial habitat, and supporting the ecological functions that contribute to flood mitigation and erosion control. In addition, the Town lies within a designated bird sanctuary area, requiring particular attention to the protection of wooded shorelines and riparian vegetation that provide critical nesting, feeding, and migratory habitat.

Approximately twenty-five percent (25%) of the Town's land area remains forested, with most residential yards and streets also containing individual trees that contribute to overall canopy coverage. The majority of the Town's larger wooded areas are located in the western portions of Town, characterized by steep slopes that are generally unsuitable for development. Of particular significance, the Ballywhack Branch watershed west of the Town remains largely forested, and substantial stream buffers continue to exist along Ballywhack Branch and Boundary Branch.

Preserving these forested areas and riparian buffers is important not only for their ecological value, including water-quality protection and habitat preservation, but also for the scenic and aesthetic qualities that define the Town's character. To further support these objectives, the Town recognizes the importance of actively managing invasive plant and animal species that threaten the health and function of native ecosystems. Consistent with this approach, the Town has begun implementing invasive species management and removal efforts and supports the replacement of invasive vegetation with appropriate native species to restore ecological balance, enhance habitat value, and improve the long-term resilience of natural areas.

### Solid Waste Disposal and Recycling

The Town provides weekly refuse removal and collection of recyclable materials. Both residents and businesses receive collection services from the Town on Wednesday of each week. In addition, special pick-ups and yard debris are also collected on a weekly basis. During warmer months, the Town provides an additional refuse removal of public cans on Fridays.

Occoquan's waste reduction efforts are centered on a residential and business curbside recycling program. The Town's recycling program is single-stream, meaning that all recyclable

materials – including plastics, newspapers, cardboard, magazines, and metal cans – may be commingled and collected by the Town’s refuse contractor. By participating in the Prince William County residential recycling system, the Town contributes to the County’s overall recycling performance. In calendar year 2024, Prince William County reported a recycling rate of approximately 43.7 percent, substantially exceeding the Commonwealth of Virginia’s minimum requirement of 25 percent.

The Town of Occoquan should continue to expand its recycling efforts and promote increased recycling among residents, businesses, and municipal operations. In recent years, the Town began replacing its aggregate refuse containers with new receptacles and adding public recycling containers throughout the historic business district to increase public access to recycling. Continued placement of public recycling containers in key public spaces will further promote recycling and encourage environmental stewardship among residents, businesses, and visitors.

To strengthen waste reduction and sustainability outcomes, the Town should consider adopting formal recycling standards or recognition programs. Options include participation in voluntary state and regional initiatives such as the Virginia Municipal League’s Green Government Challenge or the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality’s Virginia Green program, or establishment of a Town-specific Green Business Recognition Program that acknowledges local businesses that achieve third-party green certifications or demonstrate exemplary recycling and waste reduction practices.

### Green Building, Noise and Lighting

Advances in building design and construction technologies have created numerous opportunities to reduce the environmental impacts of new development and redevelopment. Improvements in insulation, building systems, and energy efficiency now allow both residential and commercial structures to significantly reduce reliance on fossil fuels. In addition, the efficiency and affordability of renewable energy technologies, including solar power, continue to improve. While preservation of the Town’s historic architectural character remains a priority, the Town should encourage the incorporation of energy-efficient design, materials, and systems in new construction and renovations where compatible with historic preservation objectives.

In 2025, the Town enacted a comprehensive Noise Ordinance that replaced and expanded upon the prior outdoor amplified sound permitting framework. The ordinance establishes clear, enforceable standards that provide meaningful protection for residents while offering the business community clear expectations, guidance, and consequences related to noise-generating activities. This regulatory approach supports economic vitality and cultural activity while safeguarding residential quality of life.

Town lighting is a defining element of Occoquan’s character and is widely recognized as contributing to its historic charm. Historically, street lighting in the Town was provided by acetylene gas lamps prior to the availability of town gas service. While authentic gas lighting

is costly to maintain, continued preservation of this feature is encouraged where feasible. At key intersections and locations where public safety is paramount, higher illumination levels—typically provided by electric lighting—should remain a priority.

In 2026, the Town adopted a new Lighting Ordinance to better protect dark skies and promote the general welfare. The ordinance establishes standards to control light spillover onto adjacent properties, reduce glare from outdoor luminaires, and limit excessive lighting levels along property lines and public roadways. These measures are intended to enhance public safety, minimize visual impacts, and balance functional lighting needs with preservation of the Town’s historic character and nighttime environment.

Regional development projects outside the Town’s boundaries may also have secondary impacts on local infrastructure and quality of life. The Riverside Crossing (formerly North Woodbridge Town Center) development, located just east of the Town across Interstate 95, is expected to generate increased traffic in the surrounding area. Ongoing coordination with regional partners and regulatory agencies will be important to ensure that appropriate mitigation measures are implemented to address traffic and other impacts associated with large-scale development, and to protect the Town’s transportation network, environmental resources, and historic character.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# REGIONAL COORDINATION

### Goal

Build upon existing partnerships with Prince William and Fairfax Counties to achieve coordinated and forward-looking land use planning and zoning along shared border areas that support and advance the Town of Occoquan's vision for the future.

### Overview and Vision

The Town of Occoquan will continue to work collaboratively with agencies and governing bodies in Prince William County and Fairfax County to address present-day needs and to plan proactively for future growth and change. The Town recognizes that it does not operate in isolation and that its infrastructure, transportation network, and public services are closely interconnected with systems managed by surrounding jurisdictions. Development decisions beyond the Town's corporate limits, including residential, commercial, and transportation projects, can have direct and indirect impacts on the Town's character, access, and quality of life.

To address these interdependencies, the Town will maintain ongoing coordination with Prince William County and Fairfax County to promote a mutually beneficial approach to growth management that supports regional needs while protecting Occoquan's historic character, infrastructure capacity, and access to essential services. Coordinated planning and communication are particularly important at the Town's gateways and along shared corridors, where incompatible or poorly planned development outside the Town's boundaries could adversely affect the Town's appearance, function, and long-term sustainability.

### Shared Border Area Plans – Prince William County

While residents exercise substantial local control over many aspects of life within the Town of Occoquan, development and transportation projects in surrounding Prince William County have the potential to significantly affect the Town's quality of life. Accordingly, the Town must remain attentive to proposed development and infrastructure projects beyond its boundaries and, when appropriate, work collaboratively with County officials and staff to minimize adverse impacts and, where feasible, achieve positive outcomes. Two issues of particular concern include: (1) development that could diminish the existing forested and low-density residential buffers surrounding much of the Town, and (2) development or transportation projects that could increase cut-through traffic through the Town.

A defining element of Occoquan's appeal to residents and visitors alike is its small-town character, which has been preserved despite rapid growth in the surrounding region. Approaches to the Town via Tanyard Hill Road and Washington Street continue to provide a sense of arrival that reflects the Town's historic origins and setting. Preserving these low-

density buffers and scenic gateways is therefore critical to maintaining the Town's identity and sense of place. While many of these buffers have remained intact as a result of long-established development patterns, continued coordination with Prince William County is essential to ensure their long-term preservation.

For example, the forested area north of Tanyard Hill Road remains protected as part of the Lake Ridge Residential Planned Community, where unified zoning, steep slopes, and the presence of Ballywhack Branch have collectively limited development. In 2014, the Town further reinforced its commitment to protecting shared border areas by purchasing approximately 17.6 acres of land at the corner of Tanyard Hill and Old Bridge Roads. This property, which was at risk for office development and expanded parking associated with adjacent uses, posed potential risks including increased cut-through traffic, additional stormwater runoff, and the loss of a scenic gateway into the Town. The Town placed the property under a conservation easement, thereby ensuring its permanent protection from development. To make more park use of the property, the Town should coordinate with Prince William County about the inclusion of the property into the County's Parks and Recreation.

Although zoning in the areas of Prince William County surrounding the Town is generally well established, continued coordination and cooperation remain important to ensure that any future development is compatible with Occoquan's historic character and infrastructure capacity. Opportunities to strengthen coordination include regular meetings between Town and County staff, engagement between the Town Planning Commission and the County's planning staff, and the potential development of an Occoquan-focused sector plan for inclusion in the Prince William County Comprehensive Plan. Such a sector plan could establish shared goals related to community design, open space and park preservation, gateway treatment, and long-term land use compatibility.

The Town will also maintain ongoing communication with the Virginia State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) regarding the Town's historic district, individual historic properties and landmarks, and participation in the Main Street America Program. This coordination supports continued eligibility for historic studies, technical assistance, and grant opportunities, and reinforces Occoquan's recognized significance to the history and heritage of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

In addition, the Town will continue to coordinate with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to ensure meaningful participation in future transportation planning processes, including multimodal improvements within and adjacent to the Town's boundaries. This coordination is essential to maintaining safe, functional access while preserving the Town's historic character and pedestrian-oriented environment.

#### *Riverside Crossing*

The IDI Group Companies and Boosalis Properties plan a mixed-use development that will include three (3) mixed-use buildings, three (3) commercial buildings, 930 multifamily residential units and 145,000+ square feet of retail, including grocery, pharmacy, restaurants

and day care near the corner of Route 1 and Occoquan Road. Development of Phase 1 is expected during 2026. The Town should monitor this development for risks and opportunities.

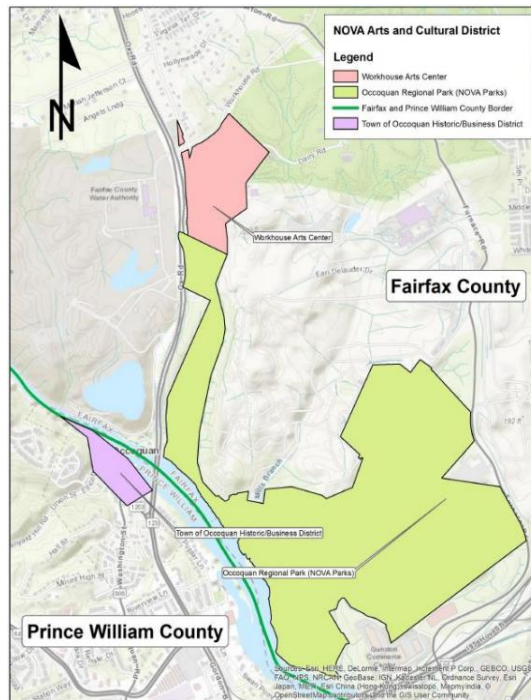
### Shared Border Area Plans – Fairfax County

The Town of Occoquan will work collaboratively with Fairfax County to promote shared interests along the Town’s eastern boundary, particularly with respect to the Occoquan River and the Lorton Workhouse Arts Center. Coordination efforts should include, but not be limited to, riverfront beautification and access, transportation corridors and connectivity, development along the Fairfax County side of the river, and initiatives that advance a shared commitment to arts and cultural programming.

#### NoVA Arts and Cultural District

In July 2017, the Virginia General Assembly unanimously enacted legislation authorizing multiple localities to establish shared arts and cultural districts. Pursuant to this authority, the Town of Occoquan, Fairfax County, and Prince William County jointly approved the Northern Virginia Arts and Cultural District, which encompasses the Town of Occoquan, the Workhouse Arts Center, and Occoquan Regional Park in Fairfax County.

As Virginia’s first interjurisdictional arts and cultural district, this designation is intended to expand arts and cultural opportunities for residents and visitors in both Prince William County and Fairfax County. The establishment of the district provides a framework for coordinated branding, programming, and investment, enabling the participating jurisdictions to promote the region as a destination for tourism, commerce, and cultural and leisure activities.



Map No. 10 – Arts & Cultural District Map

### Shared Border Area Plans – Lake Ridge Parks and Recreation Association

The Town of Occoquan shares a portion of its boundary with the Lake Ridge Parks and Recreation Association (LRPRA). Accordingly, the Town should maintain an active and cooperative relationship with the LRPRA to encourage the long-term preservation of shared border areas, discourage incompatible development, and support responsible stormwater management practices. In addition, coordination on shared transportation objectives should

be pursued to address access, circulation, and potential traffic impacts affecting both jurisdictions.

## CHAPTER NINE

# IMPLEMENTATION & ACCOUNTABILITY

### Overview and Vision

Over the next ten years, the Town intends to actively pursue the goals and policies set forth in this Comprehensive Plan with diligence, care, and fiscal responsibility. The Town remains firmly committed to preserving and enhancing the natural environment and historic character that define Occoquan and its surroundings, while also recognizing and supporting the needs of the business community.

The Town further acknowledges that effective long-range planning is an ongoing process. Accordingly, amendments to this Comprehensive Plan may be considered and adopted over time to respond to changing conditions, emerging opportunities, and input from residents, businesses, and other stakeholders. Through the thoughtful implementation and periodic refinement of this Plan, the Town's leadership is confident that Occoquan will continue to thrive as a distinctive and desirable community within Prince William County, one that attracts visitors, supports residents, and remains a place where families choose to live and grow.

### Annual Plan Accountability Report

The Planning Commission shall conduct regular reviews of the Comprehensive Plan and prepare an Annual Report to the Town Council summarizing progress toward the Plan's goals, actions, and implementation timelines. The report shall be prepared by the Planning Commission with support from Town staff and presented as part of the Planning Commission's Annual Report each year.

Recommendations and updates identified in the Annual Report shall be considered as part of the Town's annual budget development and capital improvement planning processes. In addition, the Comprehensive Plan shall be comprehensively reviewed and readopted at least once every five years to ensure continued relevance, effectiveness, and consistency with community priorities.

### Action Plan

See following pages for Action Plan.