



County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 15, 2025

FROM: **Graham Owen and Lia Niebauer**
Policy and Plan Development Branch, PD, DPD

SUBJECT: Preliminary Land Use Comments:
Plan Amendment (PA) 2023-II-2F – Pohick Estates

This memorandum includes preliminary land use comments for the above referenced Comprehensive Plan Amendment for the Pohick Estates SSPA. The assessment is guided by citations from the Plan, which are included in the memorandum in *italics*. Please note that additional comments will be provided following formal staff review of the amendment.

LAND USE CONSIDERATIONS

Concept for Future Development

The Concept for Future Development generally describes the types of land uses that are appropriate throughout the county. It has been used in conjunction with the countywide objectives and policies contained in the adopted Policy Plan to provide a foundation and framework for the Area Planning process. The site is currently planned as Suburban Center (Lorton-South Route 1 Suburban Center) and Suburban Neighborhood in the Concept for Future Development. Suburban Centers are employment centers located along major arterials that are evolving to include mixed-use cores, such as transit station areas and town centers that are more urban in character. The core areas are generally surrounded by transitional areas of lesser intensity. Unlike most of the Suburban Centers in the County, the Lorton-South Route 1 Suburban Center does not have a designated core area. However, the Lorton Visioning Planning Study, which is currently underway, is evaluating an area to the west of the subject site as a future core area. However, areas east of Pohick Road are outside of the proposed Core Area as they are a greater walking distance from the three focal nodes of activity at the Lorton Town Center, Lorton Marketplace, and Gunston Plaza shopping center, and as a result, are envisioned to remain as transitional areas of lesser intensity between the more intense areas of the Suburban Center and the nearby Suburban Neighborhoods. Within Suburban Neighborhoods, little to no change is recommended. A change from the planned private open space designation to multifamily constitutes a significant change in an area that serves as a transition from higher intensities within the proposed Core Area, and as a result, is inconsistent with the fundamental planning of the Suburban Center and Suburban Neighborhood designations, while the existing surrounding area is consistent



Land Use Policy Plan

Land Use Pattern:

Objective 4: The county should encourage a diverse housing stock with a mixture of types to enhance opportunities for county residents to live in proximity to their workplace and/or in proximity to mass transit.

- Policy b. of Objective 4 notes the following: *“Encourage universal design in the development of housing and communities to expand opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities to live in areas near their employment, mass transit and/or desired services.”* The proposed development needs to enhance walkability and safety of residents of all ages and abilities to access nearby employment, transit, and services given the existing traffic volumes along Pohick Road and lack of pedestrian-oriented infrastructure.

Objective 6: Fairfax County should have a land use pattern which increases transportation efficiency, encourages transit use and decreases automobile dependency.

- The site is adjacent to a north bound bus stop on the 371 which provides access to the Franconia-Springfield Metro and VRE station to the north. However, accessing the south-bound bus stop, which provides access to the Lorton VRE station to the south, is challenged due to the lack of a crosswalk on Pohick Road. Additionally, as there is no contiguous sidewalk along the east or west side of Pohick Road in the vicinity, this south-bound bus stop is not accessible and may present safety concerns for transit riders attempting to access this stop.

Objective 8: Fairfax County should encourage a land use pattern that protects, enhances and/or maintains stability in established residential neighborhoods.

- The existing open space recommendation in the Comprehensive Plan for the multifamily site protects the stability of the Pohick Estates neighborhood by conserving a buffer between the neighborhood and the I-95/CSX corridor, as well as by protecting the environment. Policy a. of Objective 8 notes the following: *“Protect and enhance existing neighborhoods by ensuring that infill development is of compatible use, and density/intensity, and that adverse impacts on public facility and transportation systems, the environment and the surrounding community will not occur.”* The proposed infill development is not located in proximity to any other existing, zoned, or planned multifamily use, and the proposed density is far greater than the surrounding single-family detached neighborhood and does not provide sufficient buffers or transition. Moreover, the proposal raises concerns regarding the ability of the transportation system to accommodate the change, and as will be noted in the memo, fundamentally conflicts with long standing environmental policy regarding Environmental Quality Corridors. As a result, the proposal is not in adherence with this objective.

Objective 12: The location and level of development intensity should be utilized as a means of achieving a broad range of county goals.

- As noted in the Concept for Future Development section, the multifamily proposal is located in a transitional area of a Suburban Center outside of a proposed Core Area to the west. Policy a. of this objective notes the following: “*Concentrate the highest level of development intensity in areas of transportation advantage, i.e., the Tysons Urban Center, cores of Suburban Centers and Transit Station Areas.*” The proposed intensity would be more in keeping with intensities associated with the Core Area, which is much more thoroughly served by existing and planned transportation. Other policies in this objective speak to locating development intensity in a manner that achieves appropriate community character and can be reasonably accommodated by planned transportation systems and not adversely impact sensitive environmental areas. As a result, the proposal is not in adherence with this objective.

Multifamily proposals are evaluated using the area plans, as well as Appendix 1: Guidelines for Multifamily Residential Development. Those guidelines note the desirable characteristics of sites to be considered for multifamily development. Within Suburban Neighborhoods, multifamily should:

- *Be in close proximity to community serving retail, community services, and schools.*
The site is approximately 0.6 miles from Lorton Station, however, sidewalks are not present on Pohick Road and signalized pedestrian crosswalks are not located at the intersection of Lorton Station Boulevard. No bicycle facilities are provided in the vicinity. Absent significant changes, the site is not accessible by walking or cycling, and as a result cannot safely access these services except by car.
- *Should have adequate access to an arterial or collector and an appropriate transportation analysis should be performed.*
The site entrance is proposed within close proximity to the intersection of Pohick Road and Lagrange Street. The County’s department of transportation has indicated significant concerns with the location of this entrance given the driveway spacing and the number of trips that would be generated during peak hours by the proposed multifamily use. The existing curb cut on Pohick Road is similarly challenged as a potential access point as it was not designed to accommodate the proposed density.
- *Should be located where it is county policy to provide public water and sewer.*
The site is within the approved Sewer Service Area.
- *Required site size is dependent on density, setbacks, open space, on-site parking and other considerations necessary to meet Zoning Ordinance requirements.*
See notes in site-specific section regarding density and setbacks.
- *Environmental concerns should be considered in site selection.*
The proposed multifamily development is proposed in a wooded lot within the Environmental Quality Corridor and near a Resource Protection Area.

Policy Plan Environment Element:

Objective 4: Minimize human exposure to unhealthy levels of transportation generated noise.

- A noise study will need to be conducted given the site's proximity to the CSX railroad and Interstate -95.

Objective 6: Ensure that new development either avoids problem soil areas or implements appropriate engineering measures to protect existing and new structures from unstable soils.

- The subject site needs to identify means for addressing steep slopes and Marumsco soils.

Objective 9: Identify, protect, and enhance an integrated network of ecologically valuable land and surface waters for present and future residents of Fairfax County.

- Environmental Quality Corridor – Much of the area that is proposed for multifamily development appears to be located within areas that are Environmental Quality Corridor. These lands provide myriad environmental benefits, such as protection of habitat, natural corridors for wildlife, hydrology/stream buffering/stream protection, and pollution reduction capabilities. The stream valley component of the EQC can be delineated as described in this objective. As much of the multifamily site appears to meet the criteria for EQC, the proposal appears to directly conflict with this adopted policy.

Policy Plan Housing Element:

The Housing element of the Policy Plan notes that higher densities can help support housing affordability, and that determining acceptable locations for higher density residential development is necessary as part of a strategy to provide units addressing a range of affordability. At the same time, the housing element notes that infill development should work to avoid destabilizing or adversely affecting older residential neighborhoods, and that efforts should be made to promote compatible residential development in mixed use centers. As explained elsewhere in the memo, the location and scale of the multifamily proposal would likely adversely affect the Pohick Estates neighborhood, and as a result would raise concerns.

As the site is located within the Lorton Suburban Center, the Guidelines for the Provision of Workforce Dwelling Units contained in Appendix 1 of the Housing element apply.

Lorton-South Route 1 Suburban Center - Areawide Planning Considerations:

The property is planned within the Lorton-Route 1 South Community Planning Sector, specifically Land Unit E12. The sector plan provides areawide objectives for several topics, including land use, which is provided below.

Preserve and protect existing, stable residential neighborhoods:

- *Buffer residential areas from abutting and otherwise intrusive, adjacent, nonresidential uses that have odor, noise and visual impacts;*

- *Protect stable neighborhoods from encroachment by commercial, industrial, higher density residential projects or other disruptive land uses such as landfills, incinerators, institutions, etc.;*
- *Develop infill of residential areas with residential uses of compatible densities;*
- *Develop a broad range of land use types to provide for the housing, employment, retail and social service needs of all residents;*
- *Develop housing at varying densities and costs;*
- *Locate land uses such as adult and child day care facilities and nursing homes;*
- *Develop low-intensity office and light industrial uses to both employ and serve area residents; and*
- *Develop and focus shopping facilities in the area for area residents, conveniently located for auto, bicycle or pedestrian access and limit their "sprawl."*

As the multifamily proposal would be adjacent to and accessed through the Pohick Estates neighborhood, the proposal conflicts directly with the areawide objective of protecting stable residential neighborhoods from encroachment of higher density residential projects. The proposal doesn't depict adequate buffers or transition to the single-family neighborhood or CSX railroad tracks.

The sector plan contains areawide objectives for natural and heritage resources, which are provided below.

Protect and enhance the natural and historic uniqueness of the Lorton-South Route 1 area:

- *Protect the historic and archaeological value of the area, especially the Town of Colchester, through creation of a Colchester Historic Overlay District or other such legislative protections;*
- *Preserve the rural/residential character of the land along Old Colchester Road by permitting only low density residential development on both sides of the road thus helping to protect and preserve the rural and open space character of Mason Neck;*
- *Preserve the historic character of Old Colchester Road by discouraging heavy traffic and maintaining its rural, bucolic atmosphere;*
- *Locate and preserve several of Rochambeau's Revolutionary War French Army camps along Old Colchester Road, which are of national importance; and*
- *Preserve green space, through county acquisition of additional parkland and environmental quality corridors, and through promoting clustering of development and*

encouraging greater set-asides of open space, particularly in areas containing significant ecological and archaeological resources.

- *An Historic Overlay District should be considered for the Cranford Church/Indian Springs Farm area near the intersection of Gunston Road and Old Colchester Road (portions of sub-units G-4 and H-2 of the Lorton-South Route 1 Community Planning Sector).*

The multifamily site is likely within the Environmental Quality Corridor, and as a result the proposal directly conflicts with the bullet regarding preserving green space and encouraging greater set-asides of open space.

The sector plan contains areawide objectives for environmental quality, which are provided below.

Protect the environmental resources and assets of the Lorton-South Route 1 area:

- *Discourage development on steep slopes (greater than 15 percent), areas of low bearing strength, areas of marine clay and other unstable soils, and areas of high erosion potential;*
- *Discourage development within the 100-year floodplain;*
- *Identify and protect areas of significant vegetation and wildlife habitat and migratory corridors;*
- *Consider noise and air quality impacts in the assignment of land use to abutting or neighboring parcels and in consideration of traffic to be generated by such use.*

Encourage generous set-backs from major arterials for low density residential development;

- *Identify possible current hazardous waste disposal and hazardous substance storage sites and plan for their removal or most appropriate eventual use;*
- *Recommend that environmental assessment be required for all new development;*
- *Minimize impacts of proposed new development on important ground water resources, especially in areas dependent on wells for water supply; and*
- *Recommend appropriate measures for the protection of stream water quality, particularly as affected by non-point source pollution (such as the sewage plant and landfills) and stream bank erosion.*

The multifamily proposal directly conflicts with majority of these bullets due to environmental constraints which discourage development. The site is on steep slopes with known Marumsco

soils, also contains significant vegetation and, as noted above, is likely within the Environmental Quality Corridor near the Accotink Creek and the 100-year floodplain. The proposal will also need to consider noise and air quality impacts from abutting Interstate 95 and CSX railroad. The CSX railroad expansion will also need to be considered.

To achieve the areawide objectives, the Lorton-Route 1 South Community Planning Sector contains a recommended land use plan.

The property is planned within the Lorton-Route 1 South Community Planning Sector, specifically Land Unit E12. The adopted text for subunit E12 is provided below:

Sub-unit E12

Sub-unit E12 is generally located north and west of Route 1 and traversed by Pohick Road. This sub-unit contains stable residential uses which are planned for 2-3 dwelling units per acre, 5-8 dwelling units per acre and 8-12 dwelling units per acre, as shown on the Plan map, and should be preserved and protected. Any new or infill development should conform with the planned residential density as shown on the Plan map and be of a compatible use, type and intensity to surrounding existing residential developments.

The multifamily proposal is specifically abutting the Pohick Estates single-family detached neighborhood which is planned and developed at 2-3 du/ac. Areas to the west, across Pohick Road, are planned for mixed use development and developed with self-storage and single-family detached residential uses at 5-8 du/ac. As stated in the Sub-unit adopted text, any new development should be of compatible use, type and intensity to surrounding existing residential developments. The proposed multifamily building is not in keeping with the surrounding housing types adjacent to the site or within proximity to the site, and the intensity is clearly inconsistent.

Lorton Visioning Planning Study

The subject area is outside of the study boundary of the ongoing Lorton Visioning Planning Study.

However, the Lorton Visioning Planning Study is considering potential transportation improvements to accommodate the proposed changes in land use associated with the study. One improvement that is under consideration is a modification to the Pohick Road fly-over of I-95 to provide a new interchange. This improvement, should it be added to the Transportation Plan, may potentially impact the associated site.

Transportation Plan Map:

- Pohick Road is planned to be widened to 4 lanes on the Transportation Plan Map. This improvement has not been accommodated with the development and would be precluded

by the development of the single-family detached homes. As a result, the proposal appears to directly conflict with the transportation plans for this area of Lorton.

Trails Plan Map:

- Pohick Road is planned to have a major paved trail along the eastern side. This facility is not shown on the concept but would be expected with development to connect the site to Lorton Station Boulevard, enabling future residents to walk to area amenities. DOT may have additional comments on this facility, expected buffer width, and road crossings following formal amendment review.

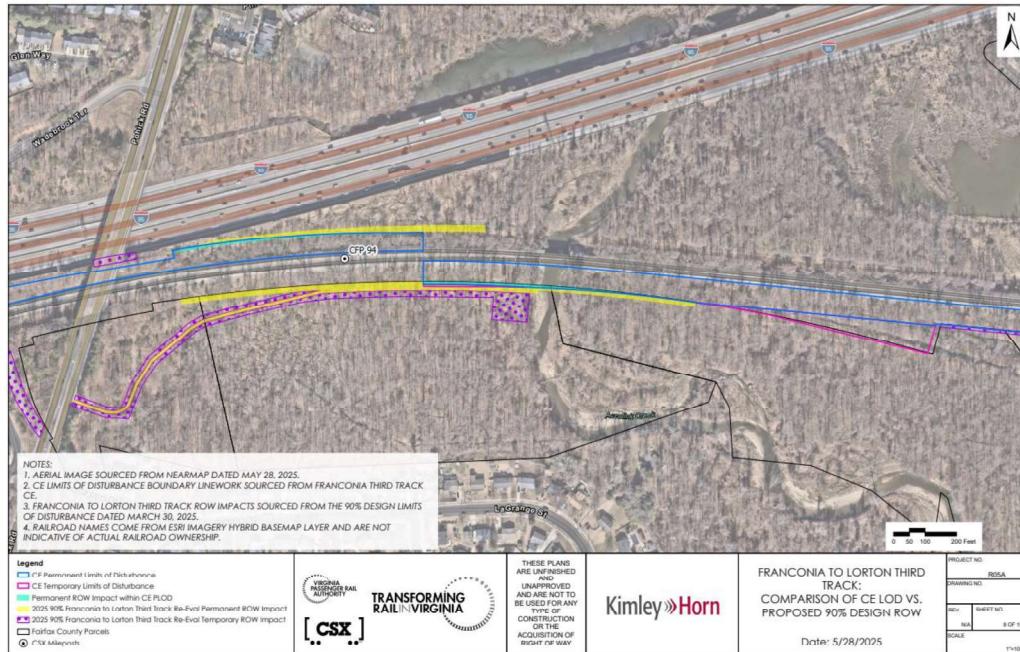
Bicycle Network Map:

- Pohick Road is planned to have a bike lane. However, given the traffic volume, lane width, and 40mph speed limit on Pohick Road, this recommendation may no longer be current. A traffic analysis will be needed to determine the appropriate bicycle facility.

Site Specific:

- Landscape buffers – the proposed multifamily development would clear cut a vegetated area between the proposed building and the low-density, single-family neighborhood to the south. This currently provides a buffer to the CSX railroad tracks and I-95. As a result, the site development will present a dramatic change for the adjacent neighbors. Given the significant grading that will be associated with the project, it is unclear how much the proposal could be modified to provide an adequate buffer. This may present privacy and compatibility issues for the neighbors given the size and scale of the building, which will be much greater than the existing single-family homes and not provide much transition.
- Soils – A soils report has been provided. The following comments are provided on that report:
 - Section 1.3 describes the project as single-family homes and Section 4.5 states “proposed commercial development”; although Boring Locations Plan on page 82 does show outline of MF building. It should be confirmed that the project is fully understood by the Geotech engineers to ensure that report recommendations are accurate.
 - Presence of Marumsco/high plastic soils are confirmed:
 - Section 3.3 Subsurface Observations: *“Based on the results of our field investigation, the subsurface conditions and stratification as observed in the borings were generally found to be consistent with the published geologic data.”*
 - Section 4.0 excerpt: *“We believe that the project site is generally suitable for the construction of the proposed developments with the associated site. However, the development cost of this property may be influenced by presence of high plastic soil and potential seasonal purchased water at this site.”*

- Section 4.1 excerpt: “*However, Fat CLAY (CH) and Elastic SILT (MH) soils found on-site...*”
- Section 4.1.1 excerpt: “*We recommend that the earthwork clearing operations be extended at least 10 feet beyond the building and pavement limits as shown on the approved final plans. Stripping limits should be extended an additional 1 foot for each foot of fill required at the building's exterior edge.*” This recommended distance should be added to 15' recommended buffer from RPA boundary.
- Section 4.9 Undergrounding of Utilities: “*Fill placement is expected in existing natural swales, intermittent streams, and permanent streams.*” More detail is needed but this would likely not be supported, at least not by comprehensive plan policies.
- Section 4.10 Storm Water Management: “*A preliminary storm water management facility is shown on the provided conceptual plan between Lots 12 and 13.*” I don’t believe there are lots 12 and 13, or that potential SWM facilities have been identified yet. Reiterate comment that it should be confirmed that the project is fully understood by the Geotech engineers to ensure that report recommendations are accurate.
- Section 3 Roof Drains: “*To limit the potential for creating wet yards surrounding the buildings and to minimize water infiltration below pavements, we recommend that the roof drain lines be piped to the nearest storm sewer inlets.*” We would likely not support direct piping to storm sewer inlets because that does not align with low-impact development techniques.
- Franconia-Springfield Bypass Rail Project – The adjacent rail track is planned to be expanded to provide a third track. The project has been moving through the design process and has needed supplemental environment reviews coordinated by VDEQ. The 90% design graphics show permanent and temporary ROW impacts on a couple of the parcels subject to this SSPA, namely the one proposed for the multi-family building. See a map of the project on the subject site below. This improvement will impact the site and any improvements, site clearing, or other changes that impact the site should be shown on the site plans.



- Rail Setback – a 200 foot setback applies to the subject site, which should be measured from the right of way. The proposed plans do not measure this setback correctly and it will impact much more of the site than currently shown.
- Noise – The site is adjacent to a rail track and near I-95, and as a result is likely impacted by transportation-generated noise. A noise study should be completed to ensure that future residents, and adjacent neighbors, would not be exposed to high levels of noise due to the development.
- RPA/Wetlands/Floodplain – An initial version of the proposal encroached into the RPA, however, following field verification, the nominator has updated the drawings to redraw the RPA line. The following comments are provided on that report:
 - It looks like the field-verified RPA boundary is probably correct; however, while we can provide thoughts on this report, the confirmation of wetlands and RPA boundaries would be done by LDS and USACOE. The applicant should confirm if they have started that process or when they intend to.
 - The floodplain is noted as preliminary so any changes in final floodplain boundary may impact RPA boundary. The applicant should confirm with DPWES/LDS on the status of the preliminary floodplain and if any changes are anticipated before it becomes final.
 - This report does not show or mention EQC so that would still need to be provided per Objective 9 of the Policy Plan Environment Element.
- Transportation Study - A transportation study will need to be conducted to assess the impacts of the multifamily proposal, consider multi-model safety improvements to connect people to nearby transit, employment, services and amenities. Access points will need to be highly considered for both the multifamily building and the single-family proposals.