



THE  
SHENANDOAH COUNTY

# Sentinel

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# Shenandoah FORUM

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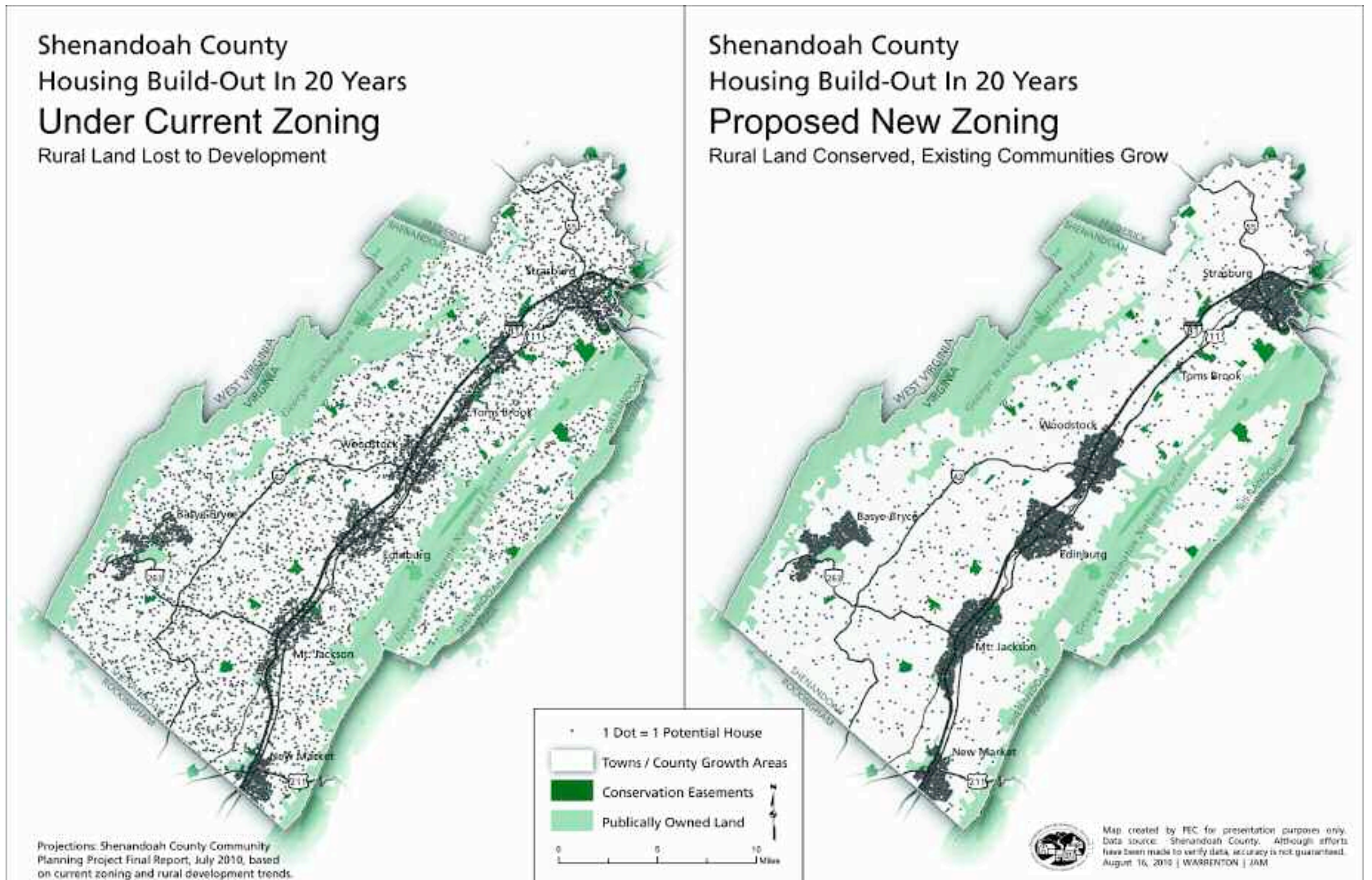
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*Shenandoah Forum fosters informed dialogue on issues of  
growth and development in Shenandoah County.*

## Looking at the Future: Two Scenarios



### 20,000 Rural Acres Lost or Conserved?

The Community Planning Project report makes clear that current housing trends would have a devastating impact on the county's rural lands. Currently, 50 percent of new housing occurs in the rural areas, where more than 7,000 small lots (under 20 acres) already exist. Demand for rural housing under current zoning could generate up to 4,000 new rural lots in 20 years and up to 9,000 new lots in 40 years.

These trends would lead to significant losses of Shenandoah County's agricultural land base – 14 percent in the next 20 years and 28 percent in 40 years. Under current zoning, the new

houses likely to be built on rural lands in 20 years would consume up to 20,000 acres. The map on the left documents this outcome.

In order to realize the comprehensive plan's vision of directing growth to the towns, the new rural areas plan offers a promising alternative. The plan would lower housing density on rural land, encourage the clustering of lots to preserve land and provide rural landowners with voluntary options to conserve their land, as it shifts 90 percent of new housing to the towns and surrounding county growth areas.

The rural areas plan would limit the loss of rural lands to not more than two percent, or about 3,000 acres, in the next 20 years. The map on the right documents this outcome.

## Promote Growth in Towns

The rural areas plan seeks to direct most new housing development to the towns and the surrounding county growth areas. Three strategies would promote coordinated town and county planning.

### Joint Comprehensive Plans:

Town and county officials together would plan where and when public services, like water and sewer, would be provided as demand warrants. Town expansions would be planned through voluntary settlement agreements with the county.

Benefits would include significant savings to taxpayers in the cost of providing public services, more efficient and compact land use patterns and greater predictability for landowners adjacent to towns and county growth areas.

**Adequate Public Utilities:** There is currently water and sewer capacity to serve the towns and county growth areas. But systems will need to be monitored, upgraded and expanded to meet demand over time. In order to provide services to new residents at the most affordable cost and scale, planning must begin now.

**Traditional Neighborhood Design:** The historic settlement patterns in Shenandoah County's towns reflect the mixed uses, human scale and connected streets, sidewalks, parks and other features that make small town living appealing to all age and income groups. State law now requires local governments to permit compact, people-friendly neighborhoods. To make traditional neighborhood design a reality, the towns and county must update their land use plans and zoning ordinances.

## Invest in Land Conservation

Shenandoah County witnessed significant economic losses in the farm sector in the past 20 years, with a 20 percent drop in farm employment and loss of productive

land to development. The rural areas plan would pursue two main strategies to strengthen the farm sector.

**Agricultural Economic Development Program:** The county would fund a farm economic development director to help current and new farmers build their businesses, promote Shenandoah County products, local foods and farmers' markets, and produce farm events, initiatives and marketing materials.

**Purchase of Development Rights Program:** The county would fund a purchase of development rights (PDR) program to buy conservation easements on prime farm lands from willing sellers. Voluntary easements extinguish housing and other development rights, keep land in farming, forestry and other traditional rural uses, and preserve valued resources, like battlefields, open space and wildlife habitat.

Funding levels will determine



how much land Shenandoah County can protect through a PDR program. Federal, state and charitable grants, and organizations like the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation, can greatly leverage local funding.

The zoning revisions call for directing new housing towards towns by reducing the number of lots permitted on rural land when large-lot subdivisions are proposed and providing incentives for developers who cluster housing and preserve surrounding rural land.

**Lower Density Zoning:** The county would limit density to no more than one lot per 10 acres in the A-1 zoning district and one lot per 15 acres in the C-1 zoning district. Once land is subdivided, no further lots could be created from the parent parcel.

**Reward Cluster Development:** The county would encourage the preservation of at least 80 percent of a rural property with the conservation subdivision option. The lot sizes would be smaller and clustered to maintain productive land on the rest of the property. In return, the landowner would receive "bonus" lots that would restore the current zoning density as a reward for using the cluster option.

## Update Rural Zoning

Shenandoah County currently permits far more subdivision of rural lands than is needed to accommodate moderate growth rates. With more than 7,000 existing, unused rural lots smaller than 20 acres each, the county today has more than a 30-year supply of rural housing parcels. The pattern of housing development, mostly large-lot subdivisions, also consumes far more productive land than is necessary to accommodate growth.



**ATTEND THE COUNTY'S PUBLIC HEARING OCTOBER 7 IN WOODSTOCK**

## Secure the Vision of Shenandoah's Future



# MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

### Let County Officials Know You Support The Rural Areas Plan!

#### District 1

Supervisor Dick Neese, New Market  
540-740-3414, neesedick@gmail.com

Planning Commissioner Mike Davis, New Market  
540-740-8754, work 540-740-2550, davisins@shentel.net

#### District 2

Supervisor Steven A. Baker, Mt. Jackson  
540-477-3550, bakerinc@shentel.net

Planning Commission Chairman Gary Lantz\*, Mt. Jackson  
540-477-3817, canhill@shentel.net

#### District 3

Board of Supervisors Chairman David E. Ferguson\*, Edinburg  
540-984-8777, davidf@shentel.net

Planning Commissioner Rick Miller, Edinburg  
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#### District 4

Supervisor Sharon Baroncelli, Woodstock  
540-459-4165, cell 540-331-4492, asbaron@shentel.net

Planning Commissioner Russ Adams\*, Fort Valley  
540-933-6730, radams@shentel.net

#### District 5

Supervisor Dennis Morris, Toms Brook  
540-436-9149, work 540-436-3611, demorris@shentel.net

Planning Commissioner Hilda C. Vann, Maurertown  
540-436-3515

#### District 6

Supervisor Conrad A. Helsley\*, Strasburg  
540-481-6167, chelsley@shentel.net

Planning Commissioner Leon Smith, Strasburg  
540-465-2325, leons@shentel.net

#### Community Planning Project Steering Committee\*

John Adamson, Strasburg  
540-465-5570, adamsons@shentel.net

Deb Truban, Woodstock  
540-459-2456, deb\_700@hotmail.com

*The rural areas plan seeks to support the farm sector, provide flexibility for rural landowners, secure long-term savings for county taxpayers and enhance the quality of life for all residents, all goals of the Shenandoah County Comprehensive Plan.*

### SUPPORT SHENANDOAH FORUM!

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