



# Coalition for Smarter Growth

Choices for our communities  
Choices for our region

## TESTIMONY OF STEWART SCHWARTZ TO THE LOUDOUN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS REGARDING RURAL ZONING

June 7, 2006

### Introduction

I am speaking on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, a network of civic, conservation, and planning groups, professionals and volunteers, working across the region for fiscally responsible growth and transportation policies. Our partners include, among others, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Sierra Club, the Piedmont Environmental Council, and the Surface Transportation Policy Project. We support the enactment of the new rural zoning without grandfathering as critical to saving tax dollars, reducing traffic, and maintaining Loudoun's competitiveness. We also support denial of the CPAMS that are soon to come before you and recommend a focus on ensuring that infrastructure needs for the 37,000 houses already in the pipeline can be met first.

Loudoun County has been absorbing 25% of the region's population growth and has been growing upwards of 8% per year. Fiscal experts consider this unsustainable in terms of the ability to meet infrastructure demands. It leads to pressure on your taxes, debt and debt service.

Loudoun simply cannot afford to absorb this much of the region's population. It's not fair to the taxpayers and moreover, you don't have to. I'll offer three reasons why, and then discuss the benefits for Loudoun: (1) regional business and civic leaders propose a different course; (2) demographics and market demand are shifting to a different type of development; and (3) there is land available in locations with infrastructure.

### (1) Regional Goals for Growth

At last year's Reality Check exercise, (<http://smartergrowth.net/issues/landuse/realitycheck.html>) the region's government, business and civic leadership proposed a different course. The Coalition for Smarter Growth joined the Urban Land Institute, the Metropolitan Builders Council, and the Greater Washington Board of Trade, in organizing this event which drew over 300 participants. Participants placed the next 30 years' worth of regional growth in residents and jobs into locations they felt to be most appropriate for growth.

The consensus that emerged focused growth near existing and future rail transit stations, shifted housing eastward, focused residential development near existing job centers, supported mixed-use communities and mixed housing, and made protection of open space and rural land a high priority. They placed no development in rural western Loudoun, except for limited amounts near towns. In effect, you have the support of regional leaders for protection of the rural land and the rural economy of Loudoun County.

## **(2) Changing Demographics and Market Demand**

Demographics and market demand are also changing. In a presentation to ULI yesterday, the well-known Robert Charles Lesser company, a real estate consulting firm, reported that the overwhelming majority of households are singles, empty nesters, retirees, and young professionals without children. The market demand from these groups is moving increasingly to transit-oriented and mixed-use communities including those more urban in character -- with most seeking far shorter commutes, even walking commutes.

( [http://www.mc-mncppc.org/strategic\\_planning/centers/May\\_3/B%20Len%20Bogorad.pdf](http://www.mc-mncppc.org/strategic_planning/centers/May_3/B%20Len%20Bogorad.pdf) )

## **(3) Available Land**

In addition, there is plenty of land available in jurisdictions in closer in locations to absorb housing and to meet this changing demand. I wish I could show you our photo library of vacant and redevelopable land in Fairfax, eastern Prince William, Prince George s County and DC. Acres of parking lots, strip shopping centers, and land in office parks have become so valuable that they will be increasingly converted to provide housing. Fairfax County is actively working to make more land available for working families, for empty nesters, for retirees, and for young professionals. Prince George s County s 15 Metro stations will be a magnet for new development and they have thousands of vacant acres inside and near the Beltway.

## **Benefits and Conclusion**

Finally, there are huge benefits to Loudoun County in adopting the new rural zoning without any grandfathering:

- n Not adding 300,000 car trips per day on already congested roads flooding downstream into eastern Loudoun communities.
  - o There is already not enough money at the state or local level to fix transportation problems in eastern Loudoun, much less to expand miles of rural byways to support 30,000 more houses.
- n Not having to provide other infrastructure at high per unit cost for scattered development
  - o Schools, school busing, fire and police coverage etc.
- n Protecting the rural economy which is a net positive contributor to the tax base, generating more in tax income than it demands in services.
  - o Farm products, tourism, and recreation all generate income.
- n Offering a competitive advantage for Loudoun County over Fairfax and Prince William Counties.
  - o By offering a nearby scenic and historic landscape, Loudoun is better able to compete with places like Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and North Carolina, in attracting and keeping dynamic and well-paid high-tech workers.
  - o Professor Richard Florida at GMU, the author of Rise of the Creative Class, makes the case that the combination of nearby rural and recreational amenities with interesting, walkable community centers, and vibrant urban places is the key to attracting and keeping these workers.

We urge the adoption of the new rural zoning without grandfathering. It is a pro-economic development, fiscally conservative, pro-taxpayer and pro-quality of life approach to Loudoun s growth, and one which we urge you to support and reenact.