

# Chapter 2: Community Overview, Vision and Plan Framework

## 2.1 Overview of Forces and Trends Shaping the Community

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Manassas was incorporated as a town in 1873, and became a City in 1975. Through these milestones, the City has experienced the natural progression from a small rural railroad settlement, to a burgeoning post-World War II community, to the mature, historic community that it is today.

There is no doubt that the City's proximity to Washington, D.C. and the greater region has spurred the development that has occurred over the past 139 years. Transportation improvements, such as the Virginia Railway Express, the Manassas Regional Airport, and the Prince William Parkway, have resulted in economic development investments in Manassas. Annexations and development occurring in the 1970s and 1980s have resulted in the land use pattern that exists today.

As the City nears build-out of all land in its jurisdiction, land use, transportation, and public facilities must be carefully evaluated to assure continued success. Changes in demographics, aging infrastructure, the recent economic downturn, and the need to advance energy efficiency and other sustainability initiatives are new challenges facing the community. Appendix D: Historic Data, Current Data, and Trends provides detailed information about Manassas. Provided here is a summary of the critical trends and issues covered in Appendix D.

### *How has our population changed over the last decade?*

Similar to much of the region, Manassas is experiencing a change in the make-up of its population. A healthy economy and increased business growth, as well as proximity to Washington, D.C., have attracted many to move to Manassas

over the past 20 years. The construction industry has been a particular draw for minority populations. Racial and ethnic diversity in the City has increased significantly. The Hispanic and Latino population is six times the number it was in 1990 with a 2010 population of 11,876

Manassas' population is also becoming proportionately older. Persons aged 65 and older increased from 5% of the population in 1990 to 7% in 2010. In contrast, the proportion of people aged 18 to 64 has been slowly declining from 67% in 1990, to 65% in 2010. The percentage of persons aged 17 and younger has been stable for the last two decades at around 28%.

These new demographic trends have an impact on local transportation needs, demand for affordable and adequate housing, needed access to health services, and other issues. Impacts of the changing demographics are important considerations when making determinations on land use, transportation, and infrastructure.



Neighborhoods continue to serve as the building blocks for Manassas residents.

### *What type of growth can we expect in the future?*

As a mature community, Manassas has few opportunities for new development on open land. Much of the undeveloped land available for development is fragmented into smaller parcels, creating an obstacle for larger scale master planned developments. To maintain a healthy fiscal balance and to create new opportunities for employment in Manassas, the redevelopment of aging

commercial corridors and centers, and infill development on smaller parcels will be especially important as opportunities for new growth into the future. It is important to encourage business growth and economic activity as redevelopment occurs, to achieve balance in the community's future land use patterns.

Redevelopment along aging commercial corridors is a key component of future growth.



*How is our local economy fairing in comparison to the region?*

Commuting patterns can be an indication of job opportunities in the City. In 2000, an almost equal number of employees commuted into Manassas as commuted out for work. By contrast, Manassas Park had more than double the number of out-commuters as in-commuters.

The employed civilian population has been generally stable over the past 10 years. Analysis of statistics reveals shifting in employment sectors. The City is gaining jobs in construction, finance, insurance, and real estate, professional and technical services, arts and entertainment, and "other" services. Sectors seeing declines include manufacturing, retail trade, transportation and warehousing, information, and public administration. Family incomes in Manassas have risen to approximately \$75,000 in 2010 and are higher on average than incomes in many locales in Virginia and the nation.

For Manassas to continue to compete in the current economy, it will have to market its unique assets and amenities, make creative and efficient use of the remaining land that is available for development, and assist with the strategic redevelopment of targeted areas.

### *Will existing public infrastructure adequately serve future needs?*

Assessments of the City's public infrastructure show that improvements are needed to maintain current levels of service. The current public water system is adequate to meet the needs of the City's service area through the year 2014, but will require expansion at that time. The arrival of a major commercial or industrial consumer to the City would require expansion of the water treatment plant. With the exception of a few localized collection laterals and pump stations, the existing City sewage delivery system is adequate to support complete build-out of the City. However, older, aging, unreliable sections of sewer pipe need to be replaced with new material properly sized to handle today's design flows.



Annual peak electricity demand is projected to increase 3% annually through the year 2016. An engineering study concluded that an additional substation will be needed in the year 2015 to meet increasing load requirements in Manassas.



Several departments are in need of new facility space or an expansion of existing space. The City Hall has reached its capacity, and an office and employment study needs to be conducted to determine future needs and how to address these needs. The City's police department is in need of additional space to meet current and future needs. Similarly, the fire and rescue department has identified need for additional fire and rescue stations to be located to better serve the southeastern and northeastern portions of the City. Co-location of fire and police operations into a single public safety complex is a potential solution to maintain levels of service while reducing public costs for new facilities.

Improvements to existing public infrastructure are needed to accommodate future growth.

In order to continue to tell the dramatic story of the City and plan for improvement to the City's museum system. The system should create a unique and enjoyable visitor experience that contributes to making Manassas an extraordinary visitor

destination. Through the Capital Improvements Program, the City has plans to improve several of the City's parks and recreational facilities.

Capital improvements are important to maintaining a high quality of life in Manassas, but they are not without costs. Decisions to make improvements will need to evaluate the ultimate return on investment, whether social, economic, or environmental, to ensure that public expenditures are worthwhile investments in the sustainability of the community. In the Implementation Strategies matrix in Chapter 10, items 7.6.1 through 7.9.2, address needs for improvements to public infrastructure.

### *What transportation challenges are we facing?*

The City's transportation system has evolved from the simple paths and dirt streets of its founding years to today's complex network that primarily facilitates automobile travel. A result of this evolution, coupled with contemporary lifestyles, is that most workers today in Manassas primarily travel alone in their car. Relatively few residents use mass transit or other transportation alternatives to commute to work. Continuation of single-occupant automobiles as the primary form of commuting is resulting in traffic congestion during peak hours, lessening of air quality, and deterioration of the pedestrian environment as roads are expanded.



Improvements to sidewalks and crossings increase pedestrian safety and comfort.

One of the main issues common to many road corridors and intersections in Manassas is the lack of accommodation for pedestrians and bicyclists. More and more communities are adopting “complete street” policies for development of new roadways and redevelopment of existing roadways that encourage roads that safely and efficiently accommodate multiple modes of transportation within the same right-of-way. This need extends beyond major road corridors. Many parts of the community, especially those developed in the last fifty years, often lack sidewalks and paths. Improvements are needed to complete gaps in the sidewalk system; provide intermodal links, especially to transit services; and develop sidewalk and path networks around major pedestrian generators, such as schools, parks, and cultural and employment centers.

Another issue with which the City struggles is access management along major transportation corridors. A major contributor to traffic congestion is the abundance of driveways feeding onto major road corridors, each introducing turning movements that not only slow traffic but create multiple conflict points and can result in a higher incidence of traffic accidents.

Parking in downtown Manassas should be managed to serve downtown businesses, residents, government services, and commuters using the train

station, ensuring that the supply of parking adequately meets the needs of the users.

While the automobile will continue to be the primary source of transportation for years to come, the City can make strides to offer improved transportation alternatives that will help to maintain road capacity, decrease demand for new parking, improve the pedestrian realm of the City, and create opportunities for healthy lifestyles, such as walking and biking. In the Implementation Strategies matrix in Chapter 10, items 6.1.1 through 6.4.3 address needs for transportation improvements.

### *Does our housing market serve our community's needs?*

As of 2010, the City contained just over 13,000 housing units. A substantial portion – approximately 37% – of this housing stock was built prior to 1980. More than one-third of the City's dwelling units are over 30 years old and many homes are in need of renovations and maintenance or redevelopment.

As of 2010 the median value of a owner occupied unit was approximately \$260,000, with the average rent cost of approximately \$1,240. Currently, 31% of owner occupied units and 66% of renter occupied unit spend more than 30% of their income on housing. The 30% threshold is a standard that has historically been used to determine the point at which housing cost become a burden according to the US Census Bureau. While almost two-thirds of renters experience housing cost burden, almost 70% of owners fall below the 30% threshold. The Implementation Strategies matrix in Chapter 10, items 4.1.1 through 4.6.1 address the need for housing and neighborhood initiatives.

### *How are we treating our environmental resources?*

According to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the region has seen dramatic reductions in pollution since measurements were first taken 40-50 years ago. The reductions can be attributed mainly to stricter regulations through the Clean Air Act of 1970 and its amendments in 1990 regulating industry, automotive standards, and promoting cleaner burning fuels. However, with continued growth of the region and the region's dependence on the automobile, pollution will remain a continuing concern. Increases in mass transit and other alternative modes of travel, such as bicycles and walking, will help reduce pollution and ensure healthy air quality for the citizens of Manassas.

As the City's remaining vacant parcels are targeted for development, many of the remaining woodlands and open spaces will be threatened. In 2001, a tree preservation ordinance was passed by the City Council which allows the City to regulate the preservation and removal of heritage, specimen, memorial, and street trees. According to the City's 2009 Urban Tree Canopy Report about 27% of all land within the City is covered by tree canopy. An additional 60% or 3,297 acres of the City could theoretically be improved to support urban tree canopy.

Increasing the tree canopy could produce multiple benefits, including cleaner air, cleaner water, expanded wildlife habitat, more recreational and park opportunities, and adding more natural beauty to the City.

More and more, cities are recognizing the economic value of sustainable development. Citizens looking to relocate want more than good schools and a great house. They are looking for opportunities to experience community and to connect with nature. Protection of air and water quality, efficient use of land, and protection of environmental resources are critical community goals that can pay off as quality of life dividends. In the Implementation Strategies matrix in Chapter 1, items 8.1.1 through 8.7.2, along with key ordinance adjustments, address needs for environmental protection.

*How does the Comprehensive Plan address these forces and trends shaping our community?*

Changing demographics, evolving development patterns, and economic recovery forecasts, mandate improved schools, infrastructure, transportation and housing in an environmentally responsible and sustainable manner. The Plan's goals and objectives were developed with an understanding of these forces and the trends that will continue to shape Manassas. Chapter 10 specifies actions that can be taken to promote the achievement of these goals and objectives. Priorities for pursuing these actions should be set each year by the City Council.

## 2.2 Vision

Manassas has been, is, and will continue to be a unique, attractive, and livable city. Our vision for the City is one that values its history, embraces the present, and plans for the future in an informed, purposeful manner.

**Manassas Past:** The convergence of transportation systems and proximity to Washington, D.C. set the stage for the strategic importance of Manassas. Our Civil War legacy touches hearts and minds, and we are committed to preserving that important piece of National history. Our downtown was and continues to be the center and identity of the community, with the City’s neighborhoods providing livable places to live, work, and shop.

**Manassas Now:** This City has the positive attributes of a small town, in the middle of a world class region. Manassas is rich with resources, including industry, technology, and high levels of education. This is a center for the arts, a place that is drawing more commercial activity while maintaining a small town flavor. There is a distinct sense of community. You want to live here.

**Manassas Next:** This City is on the way from being a historical centerpiece to a vibrant and progressive 21st Century community. There are opportunities here for clean industry, high technology, and employment. Manassas will continue to grow as a regional center for education and culture. Continued development and redevelopment will occur in a manner that is well-designed and respects the character and physical form of the community, while providing additional housing, shopping, and employment choices. Partnerships between the City and both public and private institutions will leverage resources and contribute to sustainable growth and land use patterns, supported by targeted and strategic expansion of infrastructure. High quality schools, an attractive visual image of the City, a diverse housing stock, and robust economic growth will be the outcomes.

Manassas, Virginia – is history still in the making.



## 2.3 Plan Framework: Key Issues

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### *Land Use Key Issues*

The following key issues have emerged in discussions of the City's existing and future land use patterns. The current patterns have evolved over time, a result of early settlement configurations influenced by trends in transportation demographics, economic conditions, and lifestyle preferences. In considering current and projected circumstances, the following issues need attention.

#### Regarding residential development:

- Maintenance of the City's housing stock and neighborhoods are fundamental to the City's ongoing viability.
- Residential neighborhoods should be connected to Manassas' transportation corridors and routes of access with particular emphasis on access to sidewalks and bike trails.
- Existing residential neighborhoods need to be buffered from incompatible land uses, both those that exist today and those that will be developed.
- New development impacts should be mitigated through proper site plan design proffers where applicable, and appropriate development procedures.

#### Regarding commercial and office development:

- Additional commercial activity should continue to be encouraged in the center of downtown.
- Commercial and office activities should be encouraged and maintained along arterial street corridors, with particular attention to reinvestment in the City's aging commercial corridors.
- New development is desirable within special districts including Mathis, Old Town, Sudley/Hospital, Manassas Landing, and the Airport.
- New development impacts should be mitigated through proper site plan design proffers where applicable, and appropriate development procedures.

#### Regarding industrial development:

- Industrial development and redevelopment should be organized and coordinated to avoid isolating businesses.
- Industrial uses shall be significantly buffered, and use impacts mitigated, to protect surrounding or nearby residential neighborhoods and businesses.

- Older industrial areas should be reviewed to consider potential redevelopment opportunities.

Regarding mixed use development:

- Mixed use development that includes office, retail, and residential uses should be encouraged in the sector plan areas.
- Residential uses in the downtown area, within a mixed-use context, are especially encouraged.

### *Housing and Neighborhoods Key Issues*

Neighborhoods are the building blocks of Manassas. Pressures created by demographic and economic trends threaten the vitality of neighborhoods in Manassas, resulting in a need for City attention and resources. Key issues include:

- Changing demographics require a diverse housing stock to meet the needs of new households, seniors who want to age-in-place, and future generations.
- Disinvestment and a lack of maintenance of the City's housing stock poses a threat to the integrity of neighborhoods and housing values community-wide.
- Many neighborhoods are lacking in internally connected sidewalks as well as pedestrian access to proximate activity centers, leaving residents with few opportunities for recreating and exercising in their own neighborhood.
- Manassas' neighborhoods have been empowered to improve their community, but often lack the skills needed to make improvements. Capacity building is needed.
- More community building efforts are needed at the neighborhood level to improve neighbor relations, foster schools as centers for neighborhood activity, integrate new immigrant populations into the community, and promote engagement between neighbors through community events.

### *Economic Development Key Issues*

The City's economic development issues are those of a mature city including:

- There is limited land for new development and a need to look at redevelopment as a means to expand the City's tax base.
- The City has an aging infrastructure in its downtown that needs to be upgraded.
- More than a third of the City's housing stock is over 30 years old.

- Land fragmentation – Current land ownership patterns are dominated by small parcels in individual ownership, hampering redevelopment.
- Incentives for commercial redevelopment should be created.

### *Mobility Key Issues*

Although the City has experienced continued growth, especially over the last few decades, it is now reaching a buildout condition, which presents both challenges and opportunities in planning for transportation improvements. Clearly, there are immediate, short-term needs that require attention. Equally important is defining a vision for transportation in Manassas and creating policies and mechanisms for getting there. In order to be sustainable in the long term, policies and mechanisms will need to be implemented to build an integrated transportation system that improves system efficiency and safety, diminishes reliance on single occupant vehicles, and create opportunities for alternative modes of transportation.

### *Community Facilities Key Issues*

Quality, timing and accessibility are key components to planning for adequate community facilities, recreation, utilities and services for the City. With the growth of Manassas over the past several decades, a significant amount of infrastructure has been put into place. While substantial investment has been made, there is still a need to maintain and upgrade facilities, particularly our schools, to account for future growth.

### *Environment Key Issues*

Environmental issues of key concern in Manassas include impacts and initiatives related to water quality, air quality, and noise. The City sits in the center of a major drainage divide, and accordingly, is bisected by ten drainage areas. Since all of these watersheds drain into the Occoquan River which is the major water supply source for Northern Virginia, surface drainage and stormwater management are important issues. Air quality is monitored on a regional level, and the City is a member of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

Tree and open space preservation are key issues. As the City's remaining vacant parcels are targeted for development, many of the remaining woodlands and open spaces may be lost. In 2001, a tree preservation ordinance was passed by the City Council which allows the City to regulate the preservation and removal of heritage, specimen, memorial, and street trees.

## Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources Key Issues

Manassas has a rich array of parks, recreation, and cultural resources that enrich and improve the quality of life for residents and play an important role in the economic development of Manassas. Key challenges include maintenance of existing facilities, increasing quality of service through expanded and improved facilities, and planning for impacts on these resources as a result of development and redevelopment. By ensuring adequate levels of service are maintained as the City's population grows, parks, recreation, and cultural resources will continue to contribute to keeping Manassas a great place to raise a family and reaffirm the City's identity.

## 2.4 Community Design

Attention should be given to the design of sites and buildings as land use patterns continue to evolve. The benefits of community design are not only revealed through increased economic benefits for the community, but in the vibrancy of its downtown, and likewise, in its people and their relationship to one another. There are several basic reasons for promoting high-quality community design. They are as follows:

- Citizens ultimately reinvest in a community that evokes a sense of place and contributes to their own personal sense of identity.
- An attractive, well-designed community enhances the City's image and allows for better competition with other Northern Virginia markets in attracting and retaining residents and businesses.
- Quality design allows the City to continue to be a destination for visitors throughout the country and a place that residents are proud to call home.
- Quality design enables the City to maximize the efficient use of land and to create outdoor open spaces that promote social interaction.
- By preserving and enhancing the City's natural resources and historic architectural legacy, the unique character of the City is maintained and is continued through new and future development.

In pursuit of these objectives, the City of Manassas has prepared a set of Urban Design Guidelines. This Plan update has taken a more holistic approach by incorporating the Guidelines into the Character Areas of Chapter 3. The principles contained within these guidelines will be used to

### Elements of a Healthy Community

- ♦ A clean, safe physical environment of high quality
- ♦ An ecosystem that is stable and sustainable
- ♦ A strong, mutually supportive, and non-exploitative community
- ♦ A high degree of participation and control by the public over the decisions affecting their lives, health, and well-being
- ♦ Meeting the basic needs (food, water, shelter, work, income, safety) for the community's entire population.
- ♦ Access to a wide variety of experiences and resources, with the chance for a wide variety of contact
- ♦ A diverse, vital and innovative local economy
- ♦ The encouragement of connectedness with the past
- ♦ An optimum level of public health and sick care services
- ♦ High health levels and low levels of disease

Source: Hancock, T. and Duhl, L. (1986), "Healthy Cities: Promoting Health in the Urban Context"

evaluate proposals for development/redevelopment in order to foster better, more creative, and more sustainable building and site designs which are context sensitive and appropriate.