

CASE STUDY: Frederick County's Urban Development Area

Frederick County designated an Urban Development Area (UDA) in 1987 and 20 years later amended the Comprehensive Plan to adopt the principles of "New Urbanism" and "Traditional Neighborhood Design." The county's initiatives prompted the General Assembly to adopt a UDA requirement for other localities. By building better and more densely in the UDA following new urbanist principles, the Assembly is seeking to limit the public cost of sprawling development and maintain farms, forests and open space in rural areas. However, the Frederick County UDA also illustrates the importance of right-sizing the growth area, the continuing need to implement new urbanist design standards, and the higher cost of public services from too large a development area.

Urban Development Area (UDA) Too Large for Projected Population Growth

The Frederick UDA is one example among many, that UDA's can be too large, spreading out development projects, and increasing the cost of public services, delaying the provision of amenities like parks and schools, and decreasing the amount of land that can be protected in rural areas.

- At 22,822 acres, Frederick's UDA would accommodate 91,288 housing units at a density of 4 units per acre (the minimum in Virginia's UDA legislation).
- There are 23,000 vacant lots in the existing UDA, enough to support the county's anticipated development demand for the next 20 to 30 years.
- There are another 9,000 vacant lots zoned for residential development outside the UDA, enough to satisfy residential demand for another decade or so.
- This zoning capacity would accommodate a population of 241,000 people, while the current UDA population is about 36,500. But Frederick is only projected to add 41,590 people by 2030 (growing from a population of 72,949 in 2008 to 114,539 in 2030, according to county planners).

High Cost for Proposed Road Infrastructure

Officials have projected a shortfall of \$1.8 billion for planned roads in the Winchester-Frederick County Urbanized Area, which includes the City of Winchester and about a third of the county. (The Win-Fred MPO 2030 Transportation Plan projects \$1,870,407,345 worth of needed projects and anticipates funds of only \$58,603,144.)

At least some of this high projected cost can be traced to the size of the UDA, the separation of uses and community designs that are overly auto-dependent and do not offer a mix of uses at a walkable scale that will reduce the volume of traffic. As is the case in other jurisdictions, the dependence on large and costly arterial roads, highways and interchanges instead of a fine-grained grid of local streets can contribute to higher costs. And while developers often build local streets as part of rezonings they have limited statutory responsibility for larger offsite arterials and highways.

Expansion of the UDA Requires Expansion of Public Services

Frederick County estimates that 70 percent of its development since 1990 has occurred in the UDA, but they have continued to expand the UDA during that time, from 17,122 acres in 1990 to 22,822 acres in 2008 (a 33 percent increase). Given projected population growth, there is no demonstrated need for a major expansion of the UDA or the Sewer and Water Service Area (SWSA) that underlies it. Yet Frederick is currently considering another 4,000 acre expansion. Expanding the SWSA will create new infrastructure needs across a broader area.