



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2017.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

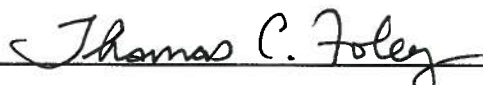
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Stafford
Program Title: Strategies for Saving Open Space
Program Category: Community and Economic Development

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Thomas C. Foley
Title: County Administrator
Signature: 

Virginia Association of Counties

2017 Achievement Award



Stafford County, Virginia

Strategies for Saving Open Space –
A Stafford County Priority

Strategies for Saving Open Space – a Stafford County, VA, Priority

Short Overview of the Program

Stafford County, VA, has used multiple programs and techniques to successfully save more than 10,000 acres of land from development and they are continuing in their efforts, devoting even more money in the FY2018 budget for the preservation of open space. The Board of Supervisors aims to strike a balance between the preservation of historical and recreational resources with the creation of new neighborhoods and economic development. A combination of programs is used to achieve this balance: the Transfer of Development Rights Programs allows land owners to sell development rights to private entities; the Purchase of Development Rights Programs gives owners the option to sell their development rights to the County; the Board has instituted Targeted Growth Areas to focus growth in areas where infrastructure already exists: the development of parks; and working with stakeholders to preserve open space. One integral ingredient to Stafford's success is having a Board of Supervisors who is committed to saving open space and open-minded enough to try multiple avenues.

The Problem or Need for the Program

Stafford County's population soared from 61,236 in 1991 to more than 142,000 in 2017. There are many factors influencing this boom but mainly the Board of Supervisors have taken steps to make the county friendly to businesses, the schools are high achieving and the amenities are abundant – people just want to live there. Also, the county is located halfway between Washington, D.C., and Richmond, VA, making it an attractive home for commuters. The backdrop to this change is a formerly rural, agricultural county, rich in historic and ecological resources. The problem elected officials faced is how to preserve the character of the county and

conserve its many resources while meeting the needs of its new residents in a responsible, responsive manner.

Description of the Program

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to preserving open space and responsibly directing development. Stafford County discovered that in trying to meet the needs of its changing population. Once a rural, agricultural and river-based economy, with residents whose families had been there for generations, Stafford has become a crossroads of sorts for federal workers, Marines and FBI agents cycling through Quantico, with residents from all over the nation and world. These new residents bring their own experience and expectations with them in terms of services, neighborhoods and schools. This all happened fairly quickly, with in the last 40 years. Devising ways to balance the preservation of open space alongside responsible development became a priority. They dedicated themselves to trying multiple approaches to achieving this goal as well as to continuously being open to new ideas. To date, they have saved more than 10,000 acres of open space while directing development to targeted growth areas with the needed infrastructure support already in place. They have done this by using several major tools in their overall quest: the Transfer of Development Rights program; the Purchase of Development Rights program; instituting Targeted Growth Areas; and pursuing increasing park lands and working with stakeholders.

- **Transfer of Development Rights program** – Stafford is only one of two localities in the Commonwealth of Virginia to adopt its own Transfer of Development Rights program. This market-driven program allows land owners to sell development rights for land that would be too expensive to develop because it is situated where there is a lack of

infrastructure. Developers who are planning to build in more dense areas can buy those rights and build more homes in the specific areas. The land where the development rights are sold is put into a conservation easement. The key is in having County staff that are well versed in the program and are available to help citizens navigate it. Making it accessible for citizens helps increase the odds that it will be used and further the County's purpose of saving open space.

- **Purchase of Development Rights program** – The Purchase of Development Rights program allows land owners to sell their development rights to the County. The land is then put into a conservation easement and will never be developed. The County notifies every eligible property owner. The owners submit an application and the County ranks the properties based on specific criteria. The purpose of this program is to help preserve the agricultural resources of the County. Additionally, many of the farms included have historical resources such as slave cemeteries, civil war encampments and even a historical tavern site. Stafford currently has six farms in the program, comprising 448 acres. This means 115 development rights have been retired for these properties.
- **Targeted Growth Areas** – The Board of Supervisors has instituted Targeted Growth Areas as part of the County's Comprehensive Plan. By focusing growth and development in areas where infrastructure already exists, Stafford is able to better control the impact of new residents and students on schools, roads and the environment. Stafford County is part of the Rappahannock and Potomac watersheds which drain into the Chesapeake Bay. Keeping Stafford's water clean is not only important to the County but to the region as well. Targeting development also helps officials more accurately predict student populations and helps inform school and neighborhood planning.

- **Parks** – One of the best examples of Stafford using a potential park to save open space is the story of Crow’s Nest. Crow’s Nest is a 2,700 acre parcel along Potomac and Accokeek creeks. It is an ecological wonder, with hardwood forests, home to migratory birds and rookeries for herons and nests for eagles, to a marsh and bodies of water home to a multitude of marine and land animals. Years ago, developers wanted to build a huge subdivision on the land. Supervisors and citizens stepped in to save the property. The property owners wanted more money than was available. Stafford worked with the state to form a partnership to save the property from development. Both entities came up with part of the multi-million purchase price. Stafford provides support to the park in terms of staffing the entrance gate and other duties and the state provides Department of Conservation and Recreation employees to oversee the park, which is a designated Natural Area Preserve. Stafford currently has a purchase agreement to buy an additional 121 acres that would bring the park to nearly 3,000 acres of preserved land that will never be developed – the kind of land that can never be replaced. By wisely managing financial resources and by forming innovative partnerships, Stafford is able to continue to seek out and afford other opportunities for parks.
- **Working with Stakeholders** – Stafford works with stakeholders such as community groups, other governmental entities and individual citizens to achieve the preservation of open space. One example is Stafford’s partnership with Marine Corps Base Quantico to seek out available properties to purchase to provide more of a buffer between the base and local residents. Quantico performs a lot of training and activities as part of their mission of national defense. Giving them a large buffer to allow them the ability to perform their activities with less of an effect to citizens is a win for both the County and

the base. Additionally, Stafford has worked with a wide array of groups to establish conservation easements totaling more than 3,600 acres including the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the Corps of Engineers, the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust and others.

The Cost of the Program

- **Transfer of Development Rights Program** - There is no cost for the Transfer of Development Rights program except for the support staff who oversee the program. The transfer is between private parties.
- **Purchase of Development Rights Program** – The cost varies depending upon the amount of money that is available through the County from rollback taxes on land owners who have deferred taxes, other local funds and matching funds available from entities such as the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation.
- **Targeted Growth Areas** – There’s no cost associated with establishing targeted growth areas. In fact, these areas save localities money by clustering the need for infrastructure.
- **Parks** – As with any land purchase, the cost of parks depends upon the sale price or land donation.
- **Stakeholders** – Again, the cost depends upon the sale price of the property.

The Results/Success of the Program

The numbers speak for themselves. Stafford has saved more than 10,000 acres of open space, including a nearly 3,000 acre unique preserve that could never be replaced. Additionally, that open space equates to 2,928 retired development rights that will not be developed in those areas – less people and less stress on the environment and need for infrastructure. Perhaps the biggest success of Stafford’s efforts is its establishment of a system of mechanisms to save a variety of

different open spaces. Stafford has become proficient in identifying funding sources and using its own revenues so that when the opportunity arises, Stafford is ready. In fact, the County is so well known for this that the Virginia chapter of the American Planning Association has invited County staff to its annual conference this summer to give an overview of its methods of preserving open space to attendees. This success would not have come about without the strong support of elected officials who made it a priority during good and bad economic times and continue to dedicate funds to the efforts. As a result, Stafford's Economic Development staff is told repeatedly by companies that one of the reasons they decided to relocate in the County is because of the beautiful neighborhoods, abundant recreational opportunities and rich historic heritage. Stafford County has made a huge effort to balance its past with its future in a responsible and deliberate manner and by all accounts has achieved success.

Brief Summary of the Program

Saving open space is not just a catch phrase in Stafford County, VA; it is a way of doing business every day, resulting in great benefits for this historically significant and ecologically complex county. Stafford likes to say its history is the history of the United States. The county was founded in 1664 and the likes of John Smith and Pocahontas walked its shores. The county lived through the Revolutionary War, the Civil War and saw Marine Corps Base Quantico help with the build-up for World War II. It borders two major rivers – the Potomac and the Rappahannock – and has wetlands and habitats for a multitude of different land and marine animals. Its population has tripled over the last 40 years as Stafford is convenient to both Washington, DC, and Richmond, VA. It is also home to many defense contractors and government offices, making it an attractive location to live. The Board of Supervisors and staff have worked hard to balance development and the resulting need for infrastructure with being

mindful of the county's responsibility to conserve its natural resources along with the historical and agricultural resources. Instead of relying on one regulation or program to preserve open space, they have made a concerted effort to explore multiple avenues of funding and using innovative ideas to preserve more than 10,000 acres of open space.

The County takes their stewardship very seriously as many of these resources and habitats cannot ever be replaced once destroyed. The efforts Stafford has made to seek out properties that should be saved and parklands that need to be preserved has ensured that generations of Staffordians will be able to enjoy those resources. The County has done this in a financially responsible way that benefits land owners as well as local government through its adoption of the Transfer of Development Rights Program, the Purchase of Development Rights Program, Targeted Growth Areas, the development of parks and working with stakeholders.

Having an ongoing vision for future preservation is crucial to these efforts and Stafford's Board of Supervisors has made it both a priority and a part of its future planning. Thanks to the Board, the people who have transferred their development rights and stakeholders, generations of Stafford County citizens will see the same view George Washington saw looking out his window at Ferry Farm across the Rappahannock. They will see what an old growth forest is at Crow's Nest. They will see one of the east coast's largest heron rookeries. They can see where the Union Army spent the largest encampment of the Civil War. And they will still see farming on the fields and farms of the county. These are things that can never be replaced and Stafford County is doing its best to preserve them.

STAFFORD COUNTY STRATEGIES FOR SAVING OPEN SPACE

Purchase of Development Rights Program

Walnut Hill Farm at Elm Springs

Jones Farm

Spotted Tavern Farm

Parks

Crow's Nest

Stafford Civil War Park

PDR Program
Walnut Hill Farm
at Elm Springs

Kellogg Mill Road

38 acres

Walnut Hill Farm at Elm Springs

Owners:
Jeff and Virginia Adams

Easement Recorded 12/18/14

Aerial View Walnut Hill Farm at Elm Springs





Walnut Hill Farm at Elm Springs

Walnut Hill Farm

At Elm Springs, LLC



Falmouth, VA



Walnut Hill Farm at Elm Springs



Walnut Hill Farm at Elm Springs

PDR Program Jones Farm

Forest Lane Road

43 acres

Jones Farm

Owners:
Kenneth and Juanita Jones

Easement Recorded 3/15/16

Aerial View Jones Farm





Jones Farm

PDR Program

Spotted Tavern Farm

Spotted Tavern Road
and Hartwood Road

100 acres

Spotted Tavern Farm

Owners:
John and Cathy Harris

Easement Recorded 9/16/16

Aerial View Spotted Tavern Farm






Spotted Tavern Farm

Parks

Crow's Nest

A photograph of a bird, possibly a grebe, splashing in a pond. The bird is in the middle of a splash, with its wings spread and water spraying around it. The pond is surrounded by dense green foliage, including trees and bushes. A large, fallen log lies across the water in the background. The water is calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery. The overall scene is a natural, outdoor setting.

Crow's Nest

A cluster of Crow's Nest mushrooms (Hymenochaetae) growing on a tree trunk. The mushrooms are light pinkish-orange with a wavy, scalloped edge and a smooth, slightly glistening surface. They are arranged in a fan-like pattern, with several smaller, younger mushrooms in the center. The background shows the rough, grey bark of the tree and some green moss on the left side.

Crow's Nest



Crow's Nest

Parks

Stafford Civil War Park

A photograph of a forest path covered in fallen brown leaves. The path is a narrow dirt trail winding through a wooded area. The ground is heavily covered with dry, brown leaves, suggesting an autumn setting. Several trees are visible, including a prominent one in the foreground on the left and several others in the background. The trees have thin trunks and some green foliage is still visible. In the distance, a small animal, possibly a squirrel or chipmunk, is seen on the path. The overall scene is a quiet, natural forest environment.

Civil War Park



Civil War Park