



2021 Annual Report

Acronyms

BOS: Board of Supervisors
BMI: Board Member Initiative
CPAM: Comprehensive Plan Amendment
FSM: Facilities Standards Manual
PDR: Purchase of Development Rights
TLUC: Transportation and Land Use Committee of the BOS
ZOAM: Zoning Amendment
ZOC: Zoning Ordinance Committee
ZOR: Zoning Re-Write

SRL Advocacy

In its annual meeting on January 17, 2021, the SRL Board of Directors adopted five advocacy priorities for 2021 (see Annex 1). The following sections describe our activities and progress relating to each priority. Our direct interventions with the County Board of Supervisors (BOS) were more limited in 2021 relative to previous years, in part because of the Covid pandemic but primarily because the BOS was not making any critical decisions relating to our priorities. Annex 2 provides a complete list of SRL's communications with the County government in 2021.

Rural Zoning Density and Preservation of Prime Soils:

The bulk of our work in 2021 focused on providing detailed, technical input and recommendations to County staff in support of their ongoing work on two planned Zoning Amendments (ZOAMs):

ZOAM-2020-0001: Zoning Ordinance Rewrite (ZOR)

ZOAM-2020-0002: Design of Cluster Subdivisions and Preservation of Prime Soils

In the Board Member Initiative (BMI) launching the ZOR exercise, the BOS specifically identified Save Rural Loudoun as one of the stakeholder groups with which County staff were required to consult throughout the ZOAM process. In March, they scheduled a meeting with us in which we presented our principal recommendations. In both meetings, we used powerpoint presentations to focus on our top priorities. We supplemented those presentations with copious detailed analysis and recommendations addressing the text of the Zoning Ordinance.

Our direct engagement with County supervisors focused primarily on the meeting of the Transportation and Land Use Committee (TLUC) in July, for which the cluster subdivision/prime soils ZOAM was the principal item on the agenda. In the lead up, we wrote emails and letters to the supervisors on the committee (Randall, Buffington, Umstattd, Turner and Glass) urging that the County address excess density in cluster subdivisions.

Before the TLUC meeting, Chair Randall spoke to John Ellis about the projected residential build-out numbers in our letter and suggested that the potential increase in by right residences may be more than we had indicated. In subsequent conversations with Laura Tekrony, Laura reported that Chair Randall's numbers included potential growth in the western towns (Middleburg, Purcellville, Lovettsville, Round Hill, and Hamilton), which explained the differences in our numbers.

In the TLUC meeting, all the supervisors confirmed that they had not intended to address density under the cluster subdivisions/prime soils ZOAM. Supervisor Umstattd said that, while she understood why we might interpret the original Board Member Initiative (BMI) as permitting a review of density, she agreed that the BOS did not intend that when they approved it.

It was unclear whether the supervisors also ruled out addressing rural zoning density as part of the separate and ongoing Zoning Rewrite (ZOR) ZOAM. This is a key issue that we will need to try to clarify in 2022.

In the same TLUC meeting, supervisors Buffington and Turner repeatedly stated that private citizens' permanent conservation easements were the "best tool" for preserving rural land. Supervisor Randall countered that easements can only be the best tool if a large number of private landowners are willing to use them. During this discussion, Chair Randall asked County Staff to provide her with historic data on conservation easements in the county, which we sent to her as a follow-up.

Following the TLUC meeting, SRL met in August and September with Laura Tekrony, Chair Randall's legislative assistant (virtual), Supervisor Turner (virtual), and Supervisor Buffington (in person) to follow up on the TLUC discussions. In addition, we wrote to Supervisor Umstattd to clarify a misleading response that she had received from County staff regarding rural sewage disposal systems.

In those follow-up meetings, Ms. Tekrony was generally supportive of SRL's concerns and helped to clarify projected rural build out numbers. Supervisor Turner told us that he looked to the western supervisors for leadership on density and other rural preservation issues. Supervisor Buffington said that he planned to work with Supervisor Turner to expand County support for conservation easements (a project that they successfully completed in early 2022). At the same time, he said he would be unable to make progress on density and other issues without support from the eastern supervisors.

It is important to recognize that, outside SRL, skepticism about whether reduced zoning density is politically achievable appeared to strengthen in the rest of the rural conservation community. This probably was due to the expected strong pushback from pro-development stakeholders and, more disappointingly, opposition from wealthy landowners who are concerned that reduced density will affect the financial benefits of their conservation easements.

PDR:

There was limited discussion of the County's planned Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program, which we had hoped would be launched in 2021. The timeline for designing and

implementing this program has been significantly delayed, reportedly due to the Covid epidemic and staffing shortages in the County government.

Water:

As a member of the County's Facilities Standards Manual (FSM) Committee, John Lovegrove requested that the Committee address weaknesses in the standards with respect to the preservation of water resources. The Chair of the FSM Committee's Public Review Council agreed to include that issue as new business on the FSM Committee's agenda in 2022.

Road Planning:

John Lovegrove and John Ellis actively participated in the County's public outreach meetings for the Safety and Operational Study (SOS) of Route 9. A majority of community participants stressed the importance of maintaining the rural characteristics of Route 9 and its surroundings. The County consultant's report calls for the construction of large, two-lane roundabouts at each major intersection between Paeonian Springs and Harpers Ferry Road.

SRL submitted letters to the County to support the Lucketts community's concerns about plans for widening Route 15 north of Leesburg. In particular, we joined those who oppose a potential "western bypass," which would evict a mobile home community and destroy sensitive wetlands in the Black Oak Nature Preserve. We also supported the Farm Bureau's opposition to the County's plan to remove 15 acres from an Agricultural and Forest Preserve as part of the Route 15 expansion project.

Zoning Enforcement:

SRL's input to the County on the ZOR project included recommendations for strengthening enforcement of the County's zoning rules.

Conflict of Interest:

In July, SRL emailed the TLUC supervisors (Turner, Randall, Buffington, Umstatted and Glass) to express concern about County Staff's biased responses to questions the supervisors had posed in their July meeting. In September and October, we emailed County staff to support concerns raised by a member of the ZOC about potentially inappropriate private meetings between County staff and pro-development stakeholders. In December, one ZOC member stated that he would not participate in discussions relating to the cluster subdivisions/prime soils ZOAM because he had personal financial interests in ongoing development applications.

SRL Outreach and Public Education

Annex 3 provides a complete list of the 41 messages we posted on Save Rural Loudoun's Facebook page in 2021. The average "reach" and number of "engagements" of these posts were 370 and 47, respectively. These numbers are somewhat distorted by the number of responses to one post that was inadvertently "boosted" to a national audience. Leaving that one aside, the posts that received the greatest responses were, in general, those that either celebrated various rural attractions or raised alarms about immediate, visceral, individual threats. In general, posts relating to more distant, long-term threats (i.e., to SRL's advocacy priorities) did not fare as well. The post including our newspaper add about "100,000 cars" was

a notable exception to this rule, reaching 759 and engaging 85. Posts with above-average reach and engagement are highlighted in green in Annex 2.

Other than our activity on Facebook, our outreach activities were reduced relative to previous years, in part because of the pandemic and in part because the County government was not expected to make any critical decisions relating to our priorities. In May, we placed an op-ed in Loudoun Now explaining our concerns about rural zoning densities and in September we placed a half-page ad in the same newspaper about the impact of zoning density on traffic congestion (the “100,000 cars” ad).

In September, we set up a table at an outdoor play event at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship, hosted by the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy. Attendance was limited and we interacted with only about ten adults at that event.

In late 2021, the SRL Board approved the establishment of a sister organization that will be incorporated as a 501(C)(3) organization capable of receiving tax-free donations. We expect that organization to be established in the first half of 2022.

Respectfully submitted by John Ellis, President of the Board
January 12, 2022

Annex 1: 2021 Advocacy Priorities

SRL's priorities for 2021 will sustain our ongoing efforts to promote meaningful changes to the Zoning Ordinance and other "rules of the game" that currently favor rapid rural development over rural preservation. Specifically, we seek to:

1. Reduce the density of cluster subdivision zoning: The Zoning Ordinance should be revised to limit the number of houses that may be built in a rural cluster subdivision to no more than the number that is permitted in neighboring counties.
2. Preserve prime farming soils: The Zoning Ordinance should be revised to require that prime soils be concentrated within large "rural economy lots" and to prevent them from being destroyed by residential or other construction.
3. Implement Purchase of Development Rights: The County should rapidly implement a PDR program in 2021, supported by sufficient County staffing and enough funding to preserve at least 1,000 acres of strategic, high-priority properties in its first year of operation.
4. Preserve clean water resources: The County should conduct a comprehensive survey of surface and sub-surface water resources in 2021. The State should strengthen regulatory penalties and procedures so as to establish a credible and meaningful deterrent against developers who violate the Virginia Water Control Law and its implementing regulations.
5. Ensure road planning is compatible with rural characteristics: Ongoing plans to improve Route 7, Route 9, Route 15, Route 50 and other rural roads should preserve rural character, provide opportunities for safe outdoor recreation, allow for the safe operation of farm equipment, and minimize water pollution and other environmental impacts in the karst overlay district and other sensitive areas.
6. Strengthen Zoning Enforcement: The County should instruct County staff to proactively monitor compliance with County zoning and land use regulations in all parts of the County and provide sufficient staffing and other resources to make those efforts effective. The County should establish penalties for violations of its zoning and land-use regulations that are sufficient to establish a meaningful deterrence against such violations.
7. Avoid Conflicts of Interest in Land-Use Decision-Making: The County should rigorously implement State and County Conflict of Interest (COI) policies to ensure that policy advice submitted by its advisory bodies reflects a representative balance of all Loudoun stakeholders' interests and concerns. County staff should be instructed to consider all stakeholders as "customers" in equal standing.

Annex 2. Communications and Input to County Government and Other Stakeholders

Dec 13	SRL responses to 6 questions about the cluster/soils ZOAM raised by County Staff in ZOC meeting of Dec. 6
Nov 30	SRL comments on County Staff's concept paper for the cluster/soils ZOAM presented to the ZOC on Nov. 24
Oct 14	SRL concerns with the integrity of the public consultation process and a County Staff member's substantive comments to the ZOC
Sep 23	SRL supplementary input on the development of the cluster/soils ZOAM
Sep 15	SRL request to meet with County Staff to discuss the cluster/soils ZOAM
Sep 14	SRL Board meeting with Supervisor Buffington (Blue Ridge)
Aug 24	Phone conversation on projected rural growth with Laura Tekrony, legislative assistant to BOS Chair Randall
Aug 10	SRL paper on rural residential growth sent to Supervisor Turner (Ashburn)
Aug 10	SRL Board virtual meeting with Supervisor Turner
Jul 29	Meeting with Ellen Goldberg and Alta Jone of B&B Guild
Jul 24	Email to Supervisor Buffington with responses to issues raised in July 21 TLUC meeting
Jul 22	Email to Chair Randall expressing thanks for her interventions on easements in the July 21 TLUC meeting and providing data she requested from County Staff
Jul 22	Email to Supervisor Umstattd addressing questions she raised about rural drainfields in July 21 TLUC meeting
Jul 21	Email to County Supervisors on the BOS/TLUC maintaining that density should be addressed as part of the cluster/soils ZOAM
Jul 14	Meeting with Madeleine Skinner of Rural Villages Alliance
Jul 13	Email to County Attorney's office asking whether a CPAM is required for any downzoning
Jul 12	Email/letter to Supervisor Glass re density and rural preservation goals
Jul 12	Email/letter to Supervisor Umstattd re density and rural preservation goals
Jul 22	Email/letter to Chair Randall re density and rural preservation goals
Jun 22	Email/letter to Supervisor Turner re density and rural preservation goals
Jun 22	Email to Chair Randall with thanks for meeting with Laura Tekrony and information about rural growth

Jun 10	Meeting with Laura Tekrony
May 28	SRL comments to County staff on flexibility provided in state law for limiting cluster subdivision development
May 27	Meeting with Delegate David Reid to discuss rural preservation advocacy at state level
May 4	SRL comments on agenda for May 5 ZOC meeting
Mar 25	SRL clarification on County Staff notes from March 25 SRL-Staff consultation on ZOR
Mar 25	SRL-Staff consultation on ZOR
Mar 18	SRL-Staff consultation on clusters/soils ZOAM
Mar 2	Paper on whether density may be considered under ongoing ZOAMs, submitted to County Staff
Mar 2	Input on soils/clusters ZOAM submitted to County Staff
Feb 23	Comments on ZOR audit performed by County consultants submitted to County Staff
Jan 28	Email to County Staff asking for confirmation that SRL would be included in official stakeholder consultations for ZOR and soils/cluster ZOAMs.

Annex 3: Facebook Posts and Other Public Outreach

Facebook Posts:

Above average reach/engagement highlighted in green.

Date	Subject	Reached	Engaged
Averages		370	47
Dec 31	Wander promotion	156	13
Dec 6	Thanking Kuhns for easements	199	19
Nov 19	Ag & Forestry district/Rte 15	82	7
Nov 15	Chair Randall re VA Assoc of Counties	168	4
Nov 14	Chair Randall re Waterford in Virginia Living	375	47
Nov 10	Environmental Commission	154	4
Nov 3	Article on Fauquier conservation	327	49
Oct 25	Article on data center revenues (boosted)	2,753	272
Oct 15	Wander promotion (boosted)	955	66
Oct 10	LTV re Brambleton	143	29
Sep 23	Thanking Buffington for meeting	258	12
Sep 18	Ad on 100,000 vehicle trips	759	85
Aug 28	Loudoun Farms	101	5
Jul 15	LWC play date at BRCES	234	16
Jul 12	SRL letter re Black Oak and Rte 15	341	66
Jun 17	AT&T tower on Short Hill	565	95
May 31	Resident curator program (Burnt Mill photo)	864	97
May 29	St. Louis	804	69
May 23	Article on “red hot” rural housing market	433	85
May 23	WashPost on “greed destroying environment”	366	33
May 19	WashPost on “housing boom in Middleburg”	344	187
May 10	Farm Bureau post on new developments	378	99
May 10	Ditto	280	59
May 6	Loudoun Now SRL op ed on density	242	73
Apr 25	Loudoun Environmental Education Alliance	148	6

Date	Subject	Reached	Engaged
Apr 4	Windchase equine event	185	10
Mar 28	Georges Mill promotion	223	19
Mar 25	Long Stone Farm promotion	281	35
Mar 9	Goose Creek Assoc documentary	175	25
Mar 9	Farm Bureau promotion	218	23
Mar 9	Gathering Springs Farm promotion	256	41
Mar 9	Oakland Green Farm promotion	221	22
Mar 9	Women farmers	202	22
Feb 28	PEC re Goose Creek Overlook development	465	79
Feb 20	Aldie	480	82
Feb 16	Public input on Linear Parks and Trails	162	9
Feb 16	Easements seminar	90	5
Jan 21	Easements workshop	133	4
Jan 21	Sale of invasive plants	228	11
Jan 20	County survey of residents	190	32
Jan 11	SRL annual meeting	227	15

Ads and Op-eds:

Sep 20 Loudoun Now Ad: 100,000 cars
Apr 27 Loudoun Now Op ed: density