



Save Rural Loudoun

Priorities for 2023

In 2023, SRL will continue to proactively advocate for concrete changes to the “rules of the game” that currently favor rapid residential development over rural preservation in western Loudoun County. We believe all Loudoun citizens benefit from the County’s rich mix of urban and rural amenities. This quality of life can only be maintained if the rural amenities are protected from urban expansion.

The November 2023 election of the County Board of Supervisors makes this a pivotal year for rural preservation efforts. SRL will continue to strictly maintain our non-partisan approach to policy advocacy, which is reflected in our close relations and support for currently sitting elected officials of both major parties. At the same time, we will seek to provide County voters and interested political action committees with clear and accurate information about candidates’ positions on key rural policy issues, including the SRL priorities listed below.

Our priorities for 2023 are divided into two categories. The first contains our substantive goals for reforms to state and local governments’ rural preservation policies and programs. The second contains our operational objectives, aimed at strengthening our capacity to achieve the goals in the first category.

Policy and Program Goals

- 1. Reduce future population growth in rural areas:** Loudoun’s Zoning Ordinance should be revised to limit the number of houses that may be built in rural cluster subdivisions to no more than is permitted in neighboring counties.
The potential rural population resulting from “by right” development should not raise County tax burdens, reduce the level of service provided by planned public infrastructure and services, erode the attractiveness of rural Loudoun as a tourist destination, or further damage our agricultural economy.
- 2. Improve fiscal planning:** The County should conduct a professional “cost of services” study that will provide accurate estimates of the costs to Loudoun taxpayers of projected development and population growth.
- 3. Preserve prime farming soils:** The Zoning Ordinance should be revised to require that prime soils within cluster subdivision developments be preserved within large “preservation farm lots” on which activities directly related to agriculture are the only permitted land use.

4. **Implement Purchase of Development Rights:** The County should rapidly implement a PDR program, supported by sufficient County staffing and funding to preserve at least 1,000 acres of strategic, high-priority rural properties in its first year of operation. The program should prioritize preservation of view sheds that sustain Loudoun’s attractiveness as a rural tourism destination.
5. **Encourage permanent conservation easements:** SRL will continue to encourage rural landowners to place their properties in permanent easement and will provide advisory support when requested. The County should increase funding to help offset the up-front costs to landowners of qualifying for relevant federal and state tax incentives.
6. **Preserve clean water resources:** The County should conduct a comprehensive survey of surface and sub-surface water resources. 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.
7. **Ensure that road planning and maintenance preserves 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 terrain, on mountainsides and steep slopes, and in floodplains and other sensitive areas. State and County officials should prioritize the development and use of superior aggregate surfaces as an alternative to paving historic gravel roads.
8. **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.
9. **Prevent Conflicts of Interest in Land-Use Decision-Making:** The County should rigorously implement State and County Conflict of Interest 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 citizens and stakeholders as zoning “customers” in equal standing.

Operational Objectives

1. **Build Policy Consensus with Other Advocacy Organizations:** We will work closely with other members of the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition (LCPCC) to build consensus on SRL's advocacy priorities and the priorities of partner organizations, with the aim of speaking with one voice to elected officials and other local government decision-makers.
2. **Educate Loudoun Citizens on Rural Preservation Issues:** In coordination with the SRL Foundation and other partners, we will expand our efforts to inform Loudoun citizens about how rural preservation affects their interests. In particular, we will focus on helping the citizens of urban and suburban areas in eastern Loudoun understand what is at stake from their own perspectives.
3. **Political Action:** While strictly maintaining SRL's non-partisan approach, we will provide information about candidates' positions on rural preservation issues to voters and interested Political Action Committees.
4. **Mobilize Funds to Support Alliance Building, Public Education, and Advocacy:** In coordination with the SRL Foundation, we will seek to build a donor base sufficient to support the administrative challenges of fundraising, alliance-building, public outreach, and advocacy.
5. **Hire Part-Time Staff:** Subject to #4, above, we will seek to hire part-time administrative support to be shared by SRL and the SRL Foundation.