



April 8, 2025

To: Planning Commission; City Planning Staff  
cc: [Planning@fredericksburgva.gov](mailto:Planning@fredericksburgva.gov)

The Historic Fredericksburg Foundation, Inc. (HFFI) has reviewed the agenda and documents to be discussed at the April 8, 2025, meeting of the Planning Commission and submit the following for general public comment.

Good evening, my name is Danae Peckler, Preservationist at historic Fredericksburg Foundation, Inc. (HFFI).

On behalf of HFFI, I thank the members of Planning Commission, City Planning staff, and particularly Preservation Planner, Kate Schwartz, for putting much time and concerted effort into the creation of Neighborhood Conservation Districts (NCD). We appreciate staff's April 7, 2025 presentation to City Council and Commissioners attention towards moving the dial forward on a goal that has appeared in most every strategic and comprehensive plan for this city since the 1990s.

We also appreciate the CIP committee's focus and continued support of the inclusion of Preservation priorities in the City budget and Capital Improvement Plan. The last two years have shown significant progress addressing long-standing preservation needs. HFFI thanks committee members for promoting transparency and tracking progress of various CIP projects over time. This is important work as we have seen many projects come and go with few, if any, details to explain the reason(s) for their removal.

Furthermore, HFFI is thankful for the inclusion of more Preservation program goals and policy language in the revised Comprehensive Plan draft. We greatly appreciate Planning staff's work to highlight the many ways that preservation practices support and reinforce a broad range of City Council's goals and vision for Fredericksburg.

Finally, HFFI sincerely thanks the countless number of Fredericksburg residents that spoke up and out in support of historic preservation during the Comprehensive Planning process. The strength of residents' commitment to preserving Fredericksburg's historic assets remains strong; it is embedded in the hearts and minds of this most historic city.

A couple of items from discussions about the revised Comprehensive Plan to note:

1. The meaning of "human-scale": city staff indicated that this refers to designing primarily for people or pedestrians rather than automobiles. This concept is not a new one in planning and urban design, and it also appears as "pedestrian-scale" in many professional studies and publications. Pedestrian-scaled development addresses the physical conditions and built features affecting a pedestrian's experience at ground level in a given environment, including visual perceptions of distance. The height, scale, and massing of a building impacts our sense of safety and comfort, and our field of vision is limited to roughly 35' in height or three stories.

2. Item 4.B. and comments related to tracking and quantifying housing production in the City seems entirely focused on new construction, and ignores the existing stock of affordable units, also known as “naturally occurring affordable housing” (NOAH), and vacant units as well. It’s easy to forget about how important the City’s stock of privately owned, often older and smaller places, that comprise the City’s NOAH; this type of housing costs far less than newly constructed units—to rent, buy, and service. Though rarely discussed, the city’s existing stock of NOAH is steadily eroding and increasingly threatened by neglect and disinvestment. Centuries of evidence have shown us how increasing development pressures result in a greater loss of older, smaller, affordable spaces in favor of larger, more costly, new buildings.

Preserving Fredericksburg’s NOAH should be a top priority in the City’s housing goals as it provides the highest return on investment. If we start counting the production of new housing units, we must also track of what we have and what we are losing in our existing stock as well.

Preservation makes a lot of good sense. It plays an essential role in the local economy, creating better jobs by investing more money in skilled labor than imported materials and revitalizing under-utilized spaces. It’s better for the environment, keeping tons of construction debris out of landfills, with a significantly lower carbon footprint than new construction. And it can foster greater equity in decision-making for future growth and provide greater stability for the most vulnerable residents in older established neighborhoods. After all, the preservation of the distinct places and spaces that flavor our city’s cultural and physical environment makes Fredericksburg such a desirable, authentic, and enriching community to live.