



COUNTY OF LOUISA

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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STAFF MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Community Development Staff
DATE: February 3, 2026
SUBJECT: Residential Growth Management Ordinance (ORD) – Policy Context and Rationale for Ordinance Revisions Outside Designated Growth Areas

I. Purpose of This Memorandum

The purpose of this memorandum is to explain the policy context, data foundation, and planning rationale underlying the proposed Residential Growth Management Ordinance (ORD) revisions currently under review. The ordinance amendments are intended to slow the pace of residential growth outside designated Growth Areas, align growth patterns with documented infrastructure capacity, and preserve the rural character of the County, consistent with resident expectations identified through the Comprehensive Plan public engagement process.

II. Background and Why This Discussion Is Occurring Now

A. Existing Growth Pressures and Infrastructure Impacts

Over the past decade, the County has experienced sustained residential growth, placing increasing pressure on public facilities and services. Documented impacts include:

- **School capacity constraints**, including the use of trailers at multiple schools, recent additions to both an elementary and middle school, and the anticipated need for additional elementary school expansions or a new elementary school.
- **Public safety service demands**, including increased Fire & EMS and Sheriff call volumes and expanded service areas.
- **Animal shelter capacity challenges** associated with population growth.
- **Solid waste and recycling impacts**, including the need to amend landfill permits to increase daily waste handling capacity from approximately 75 tons per day to 200 tons per day based on recent growth and usage trends.

These impacts reflect operational pressures that are occurring in advance of, or independent from, major capital expansion decisions.

B. Existing Zoning Already Allows Significant Additional Growth

Recent parcel-level analysis demonstrates that a substantial amount of residential growth is already embedded within existing zoning regulations:

- Approximately 9,347 parcels countywide are currently eligible for residential development by right without any new divisions or rezonings.
- Nearly 73 percent of remaining residential capacity is located outside designated Growth Areas.
- A-1 and A-2 rural zoning districts account for the majority of remaining buildable parcels, with over 70 percent of A-1/A-2 parcels without dwellings located outside Growth Areas.

This analysis indicates that future residential growth is not hypothetical or speculative, but rather already entitled under current zoning.

C. Parcel Creation as a Leading Indicator of Growth

Staff analysis further indicates that parcel creation, rather than building permit activity alone, is a leading indicator of long-term residential growth. Once parcels are created, residential development typically follows over time, even if construction occurs years later. Importantly:

- Parcel creation establishes permanent future service obligations.
- Parcel creation often occurs years before facilities are expanded or service staffing is increased.
- Existing regulations allow certain land divisions and access arrangements to occur outside comprehensive subdivision review, limiting the County's ability to assess cumulative impacts at the point when growth patterns are established.

As a result, growth-related impacts may be established well before building permits are issued.

D. Fiscal Sustainability Considerations

Preliminary operational cost modeling indicates that:

- The average annual public service cost per dwelling is approximately \$4,762.85.
- The average annual tax revenue per dwelling is approximately \$3,906.57.
- This results in an estimated annual operating gap of \$856.28 per dwelling.

If existing residential capacity were fully built out under current zoning, the County could experience a structural operating deficit approaching \$8 million annually, exclusive of capital costs associated with constructing new schools, fire stations, or other facilities.

When growth occurs in patterns that cost more to serve than they generate in revenue, it creates ongoing pressure on the County's budget. Over time, this can make it more difficult to reduce taxes, maintain stable tax rates, or invest in improvements that enhance the quality of services residents rely on. Instead, more resources must be directed toward maintaining existing service levels as demand increases.

These findings highlight the importance of evaluating how future growth patterns, particularly in rural areas, affect long-term fiscal sustainability and the County's ability to provide high-quality services in a financially responsible manner.

III. Relationship to Comprehensive Plan and Community Expectations

Results from the Comprehensive Plan public survey process indicate that residents place a high priority on:

- Preserving the County's rural character -70%
- Maintaining farms and forestlands – 91%
- Shift development away from rural land – 68%
- Concentrating growth in designated Growth Areas where infrastructure is planned – 77%

The ordinance revisions under consideration are intended to better align zoning and subdivision regulations with these adopted planning goals, particularly outside Growth Areas.

IV. Policy Framework for the ORD Revisions

The Residential Growth Management Ordinance revisions are guided by the following principles:

- Growth should be directed to appropriate locations consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.
- Rural areas should prioritize:
 - Agricultural and forestal land preservation,
 - Limited land fragmentation,
 - Predictable and manageable demand on public services.
- Regulations should slow the pace of growth, not prohibit reasonable land use.
- Growth-management tools should operate prospectively and avoid retroactive impacts.
- Tools should be objective, legally defensible, and uniformly applied.
- Growth-management efforts should focus on parcel creation and configuration, recognizing that parcel creation establishes long-term development rights and service obligations.

V. Overview of ORD Components and Their Purpose

The ORD implements the policy framework above through a series of coordinated zoning and subdivision amendments. Key components include:

A. Private Lane Restrictions

- Eliminate the use of private lanes as a means of access for newly created lots.
- Purpose:
 - Reduce incremental development without comprehensive review,
 - Address long-term maintenance and emergency access concerns,
 - Prevent dispersed rural development patterns facilitated by private access systems.

B. Division and Subdivision Definition Alignment

- Treat most land divisions as subdivisions subject to subdivision review standards.
- Retain limited exceptions for bona fide family and estate divisions that meet clearly defined criteria.
- Purpose:
 - Ensure consistent review of land divisions,
 - Reduce administrative circumvention,
 - Align regulatory review with actual infrastructure and service impacts.

C. Family Subdivision Reforms

- Extend ownership and retention periods associated with family subdivisions.
- Purpose:
 - Preserve the original intent of family-based transfers,
 - Reduce long-term fragmentation that functions as de facto subdivision.

D. Road Frontage Adjustments in Rural Districts

- Increase minimum frontage requirements for newly created lots in A-1 and A-2 zoning districts outside Growth Areas.
- Purpose:
 - Slow lot creation,
 - Improve emergency access,
 - Preserve traditional rural road patterns.

E. Minimum Lot Size and Homestead Framework

- Establish larger minimum lot sizes for new parcels outside Growth Areas.
- Define a “homestead” threshold for by-right residential development on larger parcels.
- Purpose:
 - Encourage large, contiguous parcels,
 - Support agricultural homesteads,
 - Slow dispersed rural residential development.

VI. Relationship to Rural Character Preservation

Collectively, the ORD revisions address growth patterns, not population outcomes. The amendments are intended to:

- Reduce land fragmentation,
- Preserve agricultural and forestal lands,
- Limit suburban-style development in rural areas,
- Protect scenic roadways and open landscapes,
- Slow the pace of change to better match infrastructure capacity and community expectations.

Importantly, the proposed changes do not prohibit growth, but instead shape where, how, and how quickly growth occurs.

VII. Next Steps

Staff seek feedback on:

- Which ordinance components merit further refinement,
- Appropriate thresholds (e.g., frontage, acreage, ownership duration),
- Whether A-1 and A-2 zoning districts should be treated differently,
- The desired balance between by-right development and CUP/Rezoning review.

Following staff and Board input, refined ordinance language and a formal presentation can be developed for Planning Commission and Board consideration.