Loudoun County Design Cabinet
Hirst Road Corridor
Purcellville Charrette
April 17, 2009
Summary Report
The Design Cabinet

To complement Loudoun’s great natural beauty, and to reinforce its sense of place, identity, and community, the Loudoun County Design Cabinet was formed in 2002 and aims to encourage the highest quality physical environment through the use of urban, architectural, landscape, and ecological design.

To assist the Department of Economic Development, the Cabinet provides a forum for discussion and advice on design related issues, projects, and opportunities. As a volunteer group of design professionals, the Cabinet also undertakes special design-related brainstorming meetings that provide significant community benefit. By 2009, the Cabinet has completed 20 of these “charrettes” countywide.

In early 2009, the Design Cabinet was approached by officials from the Town of Purcellville and asked to examine the Hirst Road area of the town. The Design Cabinet discussed the issue with Town of Purcellville Zoning Administrator and Design Cabinet Member Martha Semmes, and agreed to hold the charrette in the spring.

The Hirst Road Area Background & Study Area

Existing Land Use

The Hirst Road corridor area studied in the charrette includes approximately 50 acres of land along Hirst Road and North Maple Avenue, most of which is undeveloped. It is a significant gateway entrance corridor for the town, located on the access road to the town’s only interchange with the Route 7 Bypass. Some of the corridor is highly visible from the bypass.

Hirst Road, constructed with the bypass, serves as an important collector road for the town. The charrette area includes the land west of the new Purcellville Public Safety Center (Letter A on map below) and east of the recently opened INOVA Medical Office building (B), as well as some land with industrial buildings located off of North Maple Avenue(C), across from Loudoun Valley High School (D).
General Study Area

A= Public Safety Center
B= Inova Medical Office Building
C= Existing Industrial Buildings including Loudoun Stairs and L.B. Mason Excavating Company property
D= Loudoun Valley High School
E= South Fork Catoctin Creek Floodplain: in conservation easement
F= Suzanne Kane Park: in conservation easement
G= Stupar property south of Route 7
H= Chapman property
The South Fork Catoctin Creek floodplain runs along the southern boundary of the western part of the corridor along Hirst Road (E). This major floodplain, most of which has been placed in permanent open space easement, is the town’s most prominent stream valley and is mostly forested. Further west, the floodplain area is included in the town’s Suzanne R. Kane Nature Park (F). The entire stream valley in this area is used by Loudoun Valley High School students and teachers in nature study, and a nature trail built by the students runs through part of the valley, with plans for an outdoor classroom on the INOVA site.

There are six parcels with five owners in the charrette area. One 3.55-acre industrial property, the former L.B. Mason Excavating Company at N. Maple Avenue, is vacant, but contains industrial buildings and a small office building. It is the site of the town’s first Southern States. The photo below is of the L.B. Mason facility. It, along with the adjacent industrial property, is accessed across the W&OD Regional Trail, which you can see in the foreground. The trail bisects the corridor along its south.
The other developed industrial property just east of LB Mason contains Loudoun Stairs, an active stair manufacturing operation. The property is only partially developed, with about 10 of the total 12 acres still vacant. The photo below shows the developed portion of this property from the front of Loudoun Valley High School.

The largest parcel, at 20.43 acres, is owned by Branko Stupar, Est. and fronts on Hirst Road west of the Hirst/Maple Ave. intersection (Letter G on the map). It is undeveloped and covered with scrub grass/small trees, with one area of substantial forest cover adjacent to the South Fork Catoctin Creek stream valley.
The Stupar property is very prominent, being located at the very busy intersection of North Maple and Hatcher Avenue and being visible from the Route 7 Bypass. Just west of the Stupar property is an undevelopable 1.56-acre parcel that is entirely in the stream valley and is open space belonging to the Wright Farm home owners’ association (a large-lot residential subdivision on the other side of the Route 7 Bypass).
The final parcel to be included is a 12.04-acre parcel (Letter H on the map) along Hirst Road between the INOVA property and the Wright Farm HOA parcel. It is owned by Chapman Brothers, LLC. Mr. Chapman also owns the INOVA building, site of the charrette. Most of this parcel is also visible from the Route 7 Bypass.

This 12-acre parcel includes approximately 5 acres of cleared land fronting Hirst Road that is developable, with the remaining mostly forested land in the stream valley in open space easement. The developable portion includes an upper and lower area. There is a single-family residential neighborhood through the woods above this property. The developable portion is shown in the photo below.
**Existing Zoning**

All of the floodplain areas noted above are in a floodplain overlay zone. The Chapman Brothers, L.B. Mason and Loudoun Stairs parcels are zoned C-1 Office Commercial. The purpose of this district is to provide for planned office parks with limited supporting retail. Lodging facilities, banks, and indoor and outdoor recreational facilities are also permitted by right, and restaurants are permitted in a limited manner.

**Comprehensive Plan Policies**

The adopted Purcellville comprehensive plan recommends this area for professional office development to provide an area dedicated for professional office or similar uses. The plan notes that there had been limited space designated for such uses resulting in offices scattered within the town’s retail and industrial areas. Due to the prominence and visibility of this gateway area, the plan recommends that development in this area include “attractive landscaping, architectural features, and parking that is screened from view.”

The plan also recognizes the importance of protecting the character of the town’s entrance corridors. The community design chapter includes the following guidelines for town gateways and entrance corridors:

- Entryways into town should be inviting and include attractive and appropriate community signage.
- Gateways should incorporate design standards for architecture, landscaping, site development and placement of structures on the site.
- Trees and landscaping should be incorporated into entryways to enhance the appearance.
- Gateways & entry corridors should safely accommodate pedestrian and bicycles.

The town's board of architectural review must approve all new nonresidential buildings and any changes or additions to existing nonresidential buildings.

**Group Discussion & Initial Input**

On the morning of April 17, 2009, Design Cabinet members met at the Inova Loudoun Medical Building on Hirst Road in Purcellville for the charrette.

Greeting the Cabinet was Purcellville Mayor Robert Lazaro, who thanked the cabinet members, the business community, members of the town planning commission, and other attendees for their participation.

*Milt Herd and Mayor Lazaro, right*
Following introductions by the participants, Design Cabinet Chair Alan Hansen, assisted by cabinet member Milton Herd, asked the attendees a series of questions to elicit their views on future development in the Hirst Road Corridor. Their comments are roughly grouped by category:

**How Can The Study Area of Multiple Parcels Become “Greater than the Sum of its Parts”?**

- You must first consider than 13 of the 50 total acres are in conservation easement.
- The community needs hospitality services: a hotel for Babe Ruth baseball and Patrick Henry College.
- It should include a mix of residential and retail uses.
- Developers had tried to consider hotels in the area several times in the past but the hotel industry doesn’t see the numbers they need to build a 100-room hotel, but they don’t want to build a 30 or 40-room hotel. Even considering an exchange with Patrick Henry where rooms would be used for dormitory space until they were needed, the numbers didn’t work. This location is ideal for a small hotel, but chains are not interested. We need to go against the traditional hotel mentality. (multiple responses, group discussion)
- Also missing from the community is meeting space for more than 50 people. The Carver Center can hold 120, but it’s not set up for major business meetings.
- Why have this charrette now? [Answer: It was requested by the Mayor at this time. We’re lucky to have this expertise provided for us. We’ve annexed land, and this gives us more say in our future development than we had in the past.]
- We don’t want this area to be 234 in Manassas.
- I’m here to see what the town wants, not just what I can get out of my property.
- Now is the chance to be ahead of development pressure.
- The goal of our comprehensive plan is a 30/70 split between business and residential tax base. We need to beef up the business base, and this is an opportunity to increase it.
- Jim Brownell and I developed the industrial property buffered from Route 7. This property was slated for manufacturing and fuel storage, but we made the conscious decision to make the facades upgraded to be more upscale. This area could have been a fuel depot or a concrete plant, but we as property owners wanted to make a good presentation. What is the right mix? I’m not sure. We don’t want a dead space, but something that presents to Route 7 in a lively nice way.
- We want to be true to our heritage – farming and railroads, as seen in the public safety building.
- We already have $24 million in leakage from folks looking for retail and restaurants. Not all commercial development is taxed the same way. Senior housing, small hospitality, and retail could all work together.
- Assisted living is important. Nice private organizations are doing good projects.
• Yes there is a shortage, but I’m leery of apartments or condos along this corridor. I’m leery of the access need for assisted living right along the highway.

• Creating a sense of place is a challenge – we don’t want to suck the life out of the center of town. We need to work with the natural landscape.

• The arts and crafts design of the safety center sets the tone of the town – if it follows that it will give a sense of place and draw others. It fits with the early 1900s history of the town.

• Recommended styles is ok for future development e.g. Clarendon, Ballston, etc.

• You need amenity base to get office users here – hotels, restaurants, conference centers, medical buildings.

• Purcellville doesn’t have amenities to attract office buildings on Hirst Road. The reason some businesses are here is that their CEOs live here, but amenities are a problem.

• More businesses are here for the lifestyle, not the amenities. Lots of home-based businesses, with the need for small space for spinning off into an office.

• Another issue is the lack of sewerage – there is capacity in the plant but a public pumping stations is needed. We assume it will come but cost is an issue now.

• Aesthetics versus quality of life versus the rights of property owners. If I have to comply with a different zoning on my property, will the town assist in the costs for sewer and water and infrastructure?

• We received $5 million in federal funds for a sewer plant that is a $30 million upgrade that address new requirements underway now. As far as zoning fees, the process is easier and quicker than before, but we’re playing catch-up. Once you’re in the town, we have to provide service, but everyone has to play by the same rules.

• Purcellville has a 5% tax versus other places. What is the incentive to come to Purcellville?

**How Much Should Development Relate to the High School Nearby?**

• The transportation of 1400 kids is a huge issue until June 21. We need to not dump traffic onto North Maple Avenue – we need property owner cooperation.

• Kids have to leave to do anything. Is Hirst Road the place for it? Maybe put something here for them.

• We’re missing stuff for them to do – movies, etc. You could bring people here who are going to Leesburg and other areas now.

• One third of the population is under 18.

• Another piece that is missing – a place for young adults to live – there are few townhouses or apartments.
• Clarendon – know for its small places for young adults and amenities.

**Comments on a Theme for Future Development:**

• Purcellville is a town today, but our identity changes through the decades. We need to say our theme for now. Wine country – we’re the center of western Loudoun in wine community. This could bring industry here. Rural and wired – we’re both. We’re the commercial center of western Loudoun.

• We’re green, we’re going to be green in the future, and we can develop this theme as well.

• Purcellville could become the center for this region again.

• Wine country and high tech – it could happen again. Loudoun is distinct for offering campus setting opportunities for businesses. Our wine country, high tech environment in a small town resembles an environment familiar to and liked by Europeans.

• The market for businesses now is 2,000 and 3,000 square foot start-ups, professional service office users. This is the center of western Loudoun for Middleburg and Lovettsville. We’re not ready for 10,000 square foot office users, the employees are east of here.

• The market for small and independent businesses who want to own their own spot – Purcellville lets you have your own small space.

• 50 years or even 20 years from now, our rural lifestyle will be even more precious than it is now.

• Enhance our lifestyle, make it the center of local foods and wines – clarify our brand. Companies live in Arlington because of their “green” brand.

*Following the group discussion, the Cabinet and all attendees broke into two teams to examine the possibilities for the Hirst Road area.*
Team One Sketch
Team One Concepts:

Led by Design Cabinet members Mark Thomas, Kevin Ruedisueli, and Brian Fuller, Team One ideas for the future development of the Hirst Road Corridor include:

- Ensure that the needs for uses mesh with the types of buildings; 80’ deep buildings lend themselves to flexible uses.

- Add north-south connector links between Hirst and Maple to dissipate the traffic, setting up a grid pattern and building blocks between the grids.

- To the east, a convention center or possible hospital are featured, with restaurant pads along Maple Avenue. Flex/retail/office space is developed in the middle.
• To the west, feature residential and retail uses, including senior housing, all connected by sidewalks.

• Loudoun Stairs and the Mason property will be developed at a later date with a complementary use.

• West of the creek, the conservation easement lends itself to office condo buildings – nonresidential, nonretail buildings.

• The entire area features parking in the center of development blocks, with trayed structured parking in the center.

• Keep a greenway along Hirst Road with a 50’ setback that ties to the W&OD Trail and a green space park area facing the high school.

• Formalize the trail system leading from the school.
Team Two Sketch
Team Two Concepts

Led by Rick Conrath, Milt Herd, and Al Hansen, the concepts for the Hirst Road Corridor from Team Two include:

- A civic building across from the public safety center.

- Continue Main Street along Maple Avenue.

- Higher density fronting the Route 7 area to block the sound for the rest of the development.

- Building frontage along the W&OD trail.

- Grid connections of development, just like Team One.

- Place development in the style of 1930 old shopping centers, with one row of front parking to support retail on the first floor, and the rest of the parking behind. This will show activity and life in the area. You don’t want a total lack of cars and people or the area will feel dead.
• Assisted living bumps up against the green conservation areas.
• Service retail of a lower scale along Route 7 west.
• Reuse or ghosting of the existing buildings.
• One flaw in the development concept is the lack of funding for structured parking. This will have to be addressed.
• New trail alignments will provide another walking route from old town Purcellville and a more direct walking route from the school areas.

Common Threads

Design Cabinet Chair Alan Hansen noted that of all the charrettes the Cabinet had ever conducted, this one resulted in the most similar plans ever developed by two teams working independently. These
common elements included north-south connector roads with sidewalks and parking on the sides, traditional grid pattern development, roundabouts on Hirst Road; senior housing to the west, and a meeting center and/or hotel at the intersection of Hirst Road and Maple Avenue.

**Attendance**

- Attending the charrette from the Design Cabinet were members Rick Conrath, Alan Hansen, Milt Herd, Kevin Ruedisueli, and Mark Thomas. Design Cabinet 2009 Student Panelist Megan Snyder was also present.

- In attendance from the Town of Purcellville were Mayor Robert Lazaro, Town of Purcellville Council members John Lehr and CJ Walker; Purcellville Planning Commissioners Dennis Beese, Cathy Bowman and Bill Druhan, and staff members Martha Semmes and Tucker Keller.

- Loudoun County Government attendees included Larry Rosenstrauch and Susan VanEpps.

- Local residents, business and landowner representatives included Tom Rixey, George Rixey, Tom Morrissey, Rich Vaaler, John Chapman, Eric Zicht, Eddie Combs, and Sabrina Combs.