

**Stafford County**  
**Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program**  
**Frequently Asked Questions**

**1. What is a “Purchase of Development Rights” program?**

It is a program that permits a locality to pay a landowner to prevent land from further residential development. The landowner retains ownership of the land and may maintain the existing use, such as agriculture activities, and reside on the property. An agreement is required between the property owner and the County, and a conservation easement is placed on the property.

**2. Who is eligible for the program?**

Any landowner in the County with a minimum of 20 acres of rural land, zoned A-1 or A-2. The program is aimed at properties located outside of the Urban Service Area, but properties within the Urban Service Area would be eligible. Several parcels under the same ownership can be combined to reach the minimum acreage. The property must be capable of being subdivided or developed for non-agricultural uses without legislative approval. Other eligibility requirements may apply.

**3. How is the program funded?**

The Board of Supervisors currently uses funds from the County’s rollback tax, and applies for matching funds through various state and federal programs, including Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and U.S. Department of Defense (for Marine Corps Base Quantico buffering). The Board may authorize other methods of funding at their discretion.

**4. What restrictions will be placed on my property?**

The landowner and the County will determine restrictions based on the individual property characteristics, but will include limitations on further residential development. Typically, one home can be included on an easement property. Other restrictions may include limitations on further subdivision of the property, a cap on impervious surfaces, and disturbance of riparian buffers.

**5. Can my property be subdivided?**

The property owner will be restricted to family subdivisions, boundary line adjustments, or a predetermined number of subdivided lots based on the overall acreage.

**6. Do I have to include my entire property in the program?**

No. Certain areas could be excluded as long as they are determined at the onset of the program. However, a survey of the easement area may be required at the expense of the landowner.

**7. Will the development rights be held in perpetuity?**

Yes. As currently stated in the PDR ordinance, the development rights will be held in perpetuity.

**8. Is the program mandatory?**

No. Interested property owners voluntarily apply to the program at their discretion.

**9. Will the County still implement the land use taxation program?**

Yes, the land use taxation program will still be in use. The PDR program will not replace the land use program. It is simply another option for landowners to consider.

**10. What are the benefits to the property owner?**

The program creates a financially competitive alternative to selling land for development and allows continued agricultural/silviculture activities. Landowners may live on the property and retain open space and other conservation values, including environmental and cultural resources protection. Additionally, there may be significant tax advantages. Property owners should contact their own tax advisor for more information regarding tax advantages.

**11. What are the benefits to the County and/or the residents?**

The preservation of lands contributes to the quality of life of citizens, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Reduces residential growth in the Agricultural/Rural areas of the county;
- Reduces built infrastructure costs and services (i.e. schools, roads, water/sewer and emergency services)
- Diversifies our economic base by supporting agriculture/silviculture activities;
- Ensures local community-based food production capability;
- Safeguards the quality of our local waters and the Chesapeake Bay;
- Provides habitat for wildlife and other sensitive resources;
- Preserves our history;
- Provides recreational and open space areas; and
- Enhances tourism opportunities

These values and goals are reflected in the Comprehensive Plan for Stafford County.

**12. What steps are necessary to apply to the program?**

Once the County announces a new application round, an application would be submitted to the County’s PDR Administrator. The applicant would need to provide information with the application, such as a boundary survey or plat of the property, and deed information. The application and other information, including a checklist, will be available on the County’s website at the onset of each application round. Property owners should contact their own professional consultants such as tax advisor or attorney to determine whether this program meets their needs.

**13. How would I get paid for the purchase of development rights?**

Under the current process, the property owner gets paid cash at the time of closing/recording of the conservation easement. Funding is provided by the County, as well as matching funds provided by various agencies.

**14. How is the payment amount determined?**

An appraisal of the property is conducted by a qualified appraiser hired by the County to determine the value of the easement.

**15. How many properties have enrolled in the program?**

As of January 2022, 12 properties totaling 1,035 acres have been conserved through the program. A total of 273 development rights have been retired.

**16. When is the next application round?**

The County’s next application period begins in July, 2022, with the application deadline of September 30, 2022.

**17. How long does the PDR process take?**

Once an application is submitted, it takes 2-3 months to rank applications and have the Board of Supervisors authorize staff to proceed with negotiations with a property owner. Then it could take between 12-18 months once a property owner is notified of available funds. Based on the number of applications received and the amount of funds available, it may take 2-4 years for all properties to complete the process.

**18. Where do I find more information?**

You may contact the following County staff:

Kathy Baker, PDR Administrator  
[kbaker@staffordcountyva.gov](mailto:kbaker@staffordcountyva.gov) or 540-658-8675

Information is also found on the County’s Agricultural and Land Conservation Committee web page, including contact information for the PDR Committee members: [https://staffordcountyva.gov/government/departments\\_p-z/planning\\_and\\_zoning/purchase\\_of\\_development\\_rights\\_program/index.php](https://staffordcountyva.gov/government/departments_p-z/planning_and_zoning/purchase_of_development_rights_program/index.php)