

Town Business Liaison Committee Recommendations on Draft Town of Vienna Comprehensive Plan 2026 – Chapters 3 (Land Use) and 4 (Economic Development)

Dear Members of the Planning Commission:

At its recent meetings, the Town Business Liaison Committee (TBLC) reviewed the Draft Town of Vienna Comprehensive Plan 2026, with a particular focus on the Land Use (Chapter 3) and Economic Development (Chapter 4) chapters. TBLC appreciates the extensive work that has gone into this document and is generally supportive of its direction. To help ensure the Plan accurately reflects Vienna’s business environment and is implementable for both the Town and the private sector, the committee recommends the following revisions.

I. Cross-Cutting Editorial Recommendations

1. Consistent naming of commercial areas

Use a consistent set of names for the Town’s commercial districts throughout the Plan—e.g., Maple Avenue East, Maple Avenue Center, Maple Avenue West, Church Street NE/NW, Mill Street NE & Dominion Road NE, Cedar Lane SE, and the Corporate Park District—aligned with Map 3.3 (Special Planning Area – Maple Avenue) and Map 4.2 (Commercial Districts).

2. Use of “small business” vs. “business”

In places where the intent is to support all types of businesses, including regional and national brands that help revitalize centers, TBLC recommends removing “small” and simply using “businesses.” This applies particularly in the Economic Development introduction, commercial districts discussion, and strategies focused on adaptive reuse and recruitment. Successful businesses, no matter the size, are important to the Town’s economic viability.

3. Tone and word choice

Reduce repeated use of the word “dynamic” and similar aspirational adjectives in favor of more concrete descriptions of conditions and trends.

II. Economic Development Chapter (Chapter 4)

A. Vision and Goals

1. **Goal 1 – Multimodal focus**

Revise Goal 1 to explicitly include bicycling, for example:

“Enhance the Town’s commercial districts to create vibrant, **multimodal**, and economically sustainable areas.”

2. **Goal 2 – Clarify and simplify language**

TBLC recommends the Goal 2 text be revised to:

“Support **local** businesses that **serve the community** as key contributors to the local economy.”

- a. General theme of not just supporting small businesses, but all businesses

3. **New goal or sub-goal – W&OD Trail & NOVA Parks**

Add a goal (or sub-goal under Goal 3) that explicitly recognizes the W&OD Trail and the partnership with NOVA Parks as an economic driver, emphasizing trail-oriented uses, and trail-accessible businesses as part of Vienna’s place-making and tourism strategy.

B. Introduction & Economic Development in Vienna

1. **Business incentives / 901 Follin Lane SE**

In the introductory narrative:

- Remove or rephrase statements that imply business incentives currently exist (e.g., “providing business incentives”), and instead indicate that the Town may **explore** tools or incentives in the future.
- Remove the specific reference to “long-vacant office areas such as 901 Follin Lane SE” and instead describe underperforming office space more generally, so individual properties are not singled out in the introduction.

2. In the “Economic Development in Vienna” section, list TBLC before the Vienna Business Association (VBA), reflecting TBLC’s status as an official Town advisory body (e.g., “...the Town Business Liaison Committee (TBLC), the Vienna Business Association (VBA), Fairfax County...”).

3. **Business challenges language**

Where the text references a “need for more centralized guidance,” TBLC recommends

rephrasing to highlight current challenges such as rising rents, product and labor costs, regulatory compliance, and space constraints rather than being vague.

C. Special Events and Economic Impact

1. Section placement

Move the “Special Events and Economic Impact” subsection so it appears later in the chapter, preferably close to the end, but definitely after “Economic Development Climate”—so the chapter flows from context to conditions to tools (with events as one tool).

2. Content edits

- Remove the sentence that “Vienna’s special events also serve as economic incubators,” as this is not the intent of these events and they do not serve as incubators.
 - Replace “major events” with a term such as “signature community events.”
 - Ensure the spelling/formatting of “ViVa! Vienna!” is consistent throughout the document.
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D. Regional Context & Economic Factors

1. Extend the concept of “community” beyond Town limits

In the “Regional Context and Nearby Centers” section, explicitly acknowledge that Vienna’s business community and customer base extend beyond the Town’s corporate limits and ZIP code, with a high share of visitors and shoppers coming from nearby Fairfax County. Include the statistic from the County that 96% of Town of Vienna commercial and park visitors are non-residents.

2. “Older commercial space...” paragraph

TBLC recommends rewriting the paragraph beginning “Older commercial space that does not face Maple Avenue...” to:

- Emphasize **opportunities for reinvestment, adaptive reuse, and revitalization** rather than highlighting conversions to residential; and

- Statement added to note concern that commercial square footage is scarce and should be preserved when feasible when there are redevelopment opportunities.

3. **Home-based business discussion**

Consider pulling out the home-based business discussion as a distinct subparagraph and linking it more clearly to strategies under Goal 2, given the documented growth in this sector.

E. Commercial Districts

1. **Maple Avenue East and West**

- Remove or revise the time-sensitive sentence that begins “As of this writing...” regarding the lack of formal development proposals, which may quickly become outdated.
- Add language acknowledging that **three-story mixed use buildings with a true ground-floor retail space require building heights calibrated for modern retail floor-to-ceiling needs and that zoning should support commercially viable three-story mixed-use on Maple Avenue.**

2. **Church Street NE/NW**

- Add explicit reference to partnership with NOVA Parks and activating the commercial properties adjacent to the W&OD Trail as a key redevelopment and trail-oriented economic opportunity.
- Note that no Church Street Vision projects have been both approved and constructed since 2014 and encourage a **proactive approach** to working with property owners to update the overlay and achieve feasible projects that fulfill the Church Street Vision.
- Correct “bicycles sales” to “bicycle sales” in the Washington & Old Dominion Railroad Park section.
- SEE LAND USE RECOMMENDATION TO SEPARATE OVERLAY FROM NE. If separated in Land Use, separate in this section as well or be intentional about differentiating the two areas in this paragraph.

3. Mill Street NE and Dominion Road NE

- Remove reference to “garden centers” as there isn’t one located in this area.

4. **Cedar Lane SE**

Strengthen the Cedar Lane section to:

- Acknowledge the presence of national and regional retailers alongside local businesses (e.g., Ace Hardware and other chains) and clarify that both “mom-and-pop” and national brands are welcome and valuable in Vienna.
- Highlight the owner’s recent investments in Cedar Park Shopping Center as a case study of reinvestment leading to stronger tenancy.

5. **Corporate Park District**

- Correct the spacing error in “approximately 1.24 million square feet.”
- Remove the specific reference to the long-vacant office building at 901 Follin Lane SE and describe vacancy issues more generally.
- Disagree there should be a Small Area Plan here as the current corporate uses are acceptable and sustainable for the long-term needs of our community.
- Add language encouraging restoration and enhancement of tree canopy and buffering along the W&OD Trail edge, coordinated with Dominion Energy and NOVA Parks.

F. Goals, Policies, and Strategies (Chapter 4)

1. **Streetscape and place-making**

Building on existing Policy 1.1 and Strategy 1.1.2, add a strategy under Goal 3 (e.g., 3.2.x) to:

“Market the Town’s identity through coordinated streetscape, wayfinding, and place-making investments in commercial districts.”

2. **Goal 2 – business support**

- Revise Strategy 2.1.1 to a more flexible form such as:

“Support incubation and growth opportunities for new and existing businesses within the Town (e.g., shared workspaces, mentoring, technical assistance, and connections to regional resources).”

- Where appropriate, remove “small” when the intent is to support all business types (including national brands) that can help revitalize struggling areas.
- Strengthen Strategy 2.2.3 on home-based businesses by specifying outreach, education, and possible zoning/code refinements that maintain neighborhood character while supporting this growing segment.

3. **Goal 3 – W&OD and visitor attraction**

Add a strategy recognizing the W&OD Trail and Town Green as economic anchors, for example:

“Work with NOVA Parks and local businesses to position Vienna’s trail-accessible areas as hubs for dining, retail, and cultural events, recognizing the W&OD Trail and Town Green as key cultural and economic centers.”

- Policy 3.2.2 include language around streetscape, banners, directional signage, and sponsorship opportunities.

4. **Goal 4 – business-friendly environment**

- Under Policy 4.2, add a strategy such as:

“Actively recruit new, successful, and growing businesses—including both local entrepreneurs and complementary regional/national brands—to fill vacancies and strengthen key commercial centers.”

- Under Policy 4.3, maintain Strategy 4.3.2 (Small Area Plan for Mill and Dominion) and add a companion strategy calling for a focused planning effort or Small Area Plan for Church Street NE and the adjacent trail-fronting properties, coordinated with the Church Street Vision overlay and the NOVA Parks partnership.

5. **Goal 5 – Corporate Park**

- Remove Strategy 5.1.1 (“Develop a Small Area Plan for the Corporate Park District”) and replace it with a strategy focused on treescape, buffering, and high-quality site design along the W&OD frontage and internal streets. It is important to remember that the Corporate Park area backs-up to residential

neighborhoods that are impacted by their lighting, sound, etc., especially with the tree removal along the W&OD Trail.

- Ensure Goal 5 and its policies clearly reinforce Corporate Park’s role as an employment center and do not unintentionally promote conversion away from corporate and institutional uses.

6. **Potential façade / storefront incentives**

Add a strategy—likely under Policy 1.1 or 4.2—stating that the Town will **consider** public–private programs (e.g., façade improvement or storefront enhancement incentives) to encourage private investment in building appearance and functionality, without committing to a specific funding mechanism at this time.

III. Land Use Chapter (Chapter 3)

A. Development Trends & Regional Context

1. **Casino / gaming opposition**

In the “Nearby Fairfax County” section, when discussing the proposed gaming/gambling development in Tysons, expand the sentence to acknowledge that the Town, residents, **community associations, and civic organizations** have expressed opposition.

2. **Large retailers and Tysons**

Reframe the language that currently suggests large-scale retailers are only available in Tysons or outside Vienna. TBLC recommends clarifying that:

- Large and national retailers exist both **within** Vienna (e.g., Cedar Lane, Maple Avenue) and nearby;
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B. Residential & Institutional Uses

1. **Residential land use terminology**

In Residential Land Use text and figures, avoid abbreviations such as “neigh zones” and instead use “neighborhood” or full zoning district names for clarity.

2. **Parks, Governmental, and Institutional / PR zone**

- Remove or correct the confusing sentence that “new buildings and clearing are not far more restricted than in the PR zone.”
 - Clarify that the Town intends to provide mechanisms that allow churches, schools, and other institutional uses to update and improve their facilities, and that regulations should not impose more onerous conditions on these institutions than on comparable commercial uses.
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C. Special Planning Areas

1. Maple Avenue height and feasibility

- In the Maple Avenue special planning area narrative, where the 42-foot height limit for Maple Avenue Center is discussed, add policy language recognizing that viable three-story, ground-floor retail projects require sufficient building height.
- Recommend that the Town evaluate increasing maximum building height to 42 feet for Maple Avenue East and West as well, to support economically viable three-story mixed-use buildings with active commercial frontage. In this section, language could reflect this by **acknowledging that three-story mixed use buildings with a true ground-floor retail space require building heights calibrated for modern retail floor-to-ceiling needs and that zoning should support commercially viable three-story mixed-use on Maple Avenue.**

3. Church Street NE – distinct subdistrict and Future Land Use clean-up

TBLC recommends that the Land Use chapter’s “Church Street Vision” separate this distinctively different area from Church Street NE area as they have a different zoning and purpose in the town. TBLC recommends that the Plan:

- **Create a separate Church Street NE subdistrict** in the Land Use text. This subdistrict should carry a Mixed Use (no ground-floor residential) designation.
- **Clarify the zoning changes anticipated for Church Street NE**, regardless of whether the Planning Commission ultimately recommends keeping the current commercial-only ground floor requirement or amending it, The Plan should state that the Church Street NE subdistrict will require follow-on zoning text updates to:
 - i. reinforce the requirement for commercial uses at the ground floor along Church Street NE if the Town maintains the current policy;

- ii. calibrate heights, setbacks, and streetscape standards to support topographically appropriate commercial and service uses; and
- **If the Town later chooses to allow limited ground-floor residential in Church Street NE**, the Plan should still spell out that:
 - i. the Church Street NE subdistrict boundaries and zoning text must first be updated to define exactly where such uses are permitted; and
 - ii. any ground-floor residential should be located behind or above primary commercial frontages so that the Church Street NE corridor continues to read as a commercial street;

2. **Trail integration and commercial corridors**

- In the NOVA Parks / W&OD Trail section, add a sentence explicitly stating that the W&OD Trail and Town Green serve as a cultural and economic center for Vienna, connecting residents and visitors to the Maple Avenue, Church Street, and the industrial corridor of Mill/Dominion for shopping, dining, and services.
- Emphasize coordination between Land Use, Economic Development, and Parks & Recreation around trail-accessible connectivity and activation.

D. Industrial/Flex and Trail Interface

In the Mill/Dominion Industrial/Flex area section, build on the existing discussion of NOVA Parks and trail-adjacent parking by reinforcing the economic importance of trail-oriented uses and parking, and cross-referencing Economic Development strategies that focus on trail-accessible businesses.

E. Landscaping, Trees, and Dominion Coordination

In the Land Use chapter (with cross-references to Parks & Recreation), add language that:

- Elevates **landscaping and tree canopy** as critical components of commercial corridor attractiveness and business success; and
 - Ensure streetscape continues for entirety of Maple Avenue and not just Avenue Center with particular attention to Avenue West.

- Calls for continued coordination with Dominion Energy and NOVA Parks on tree preservation, replacement, and planting along the W&OD corridor and other utility-affected areas, including corporate and industrial districts.
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IV. Home-Based Businesses (Chapters 3 & 4)

TBLC encourages the Town to ensure that home-based businesses are clearly recognized and supported across both Land Use and Economic Development:

- Reinforce Land Use language stating that home-based businesses are appropriate in residential areas when impacts are minimal; and
 - Align Economic Development strategies (particularly 2.2.3) so that zoning, permits, and outreach reflect the growing role of home-based enterprises in Vienna's economy while protecting neighborhood character.
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On behalf of the TBLC, thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. We believe these revisions will make the Comprehensive Plan more accurate, business-friendly, and reflective of Vienna's commitment to both its small-town character and a strong, sustainable commercial base. We look forward to continued collaboration as the Plan moves toward adoption.

Sincerely,

Jen Morrow
Chair, Town Business Liaison Committee

cc: Vienna Town Council

Town Manager
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