

Weather

Saturday: Mostly sunny. High 58. Low 44.
Sunday: Early rain, windy, sun late. High 60. Low 28.

Details, Page C12

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Inside: Book World, TV Week,
The Post Magazine, Comics
Today's Contents on Page A2

\$1.50

Prices may vary in areas outside metropolitan Washington. (See box on Page A2)

Density Limits Only Add To Sprawl Large Lots Eat Up Area Countryside

By PETER WHORISKEY
Washington Post Staff Writer

The war on sprawl around Washington has made a profound impact on the metropolitan landscape.

More than half of the land surrounding the nation's capital is now protected from typical suburban housing development, according to a Washington Post review of land plans in 14 counties in Virginia and Maryland. Restrictions in these "rural" areas limit home builders to no more than one house for every three acres, with several counties curtailing development even more.

"You know you see those pretty water-color paintings of houses and trees and fields? It's like that here," said Ginger Dietsch, an IBM project manager with a new home on a five-acre lot in Montgomery County. "It's a pastoral setting, very green and very pretty."

No other U.S. region of comparable size has protected so much land this way, according to a survey of urban planners.

But while the limits on rural building are supposed to be saving farmland, forests and meadows, a regional view of development patterns indicates that many of these anti-sprawl measures have accelerated the consumption of woods and fields and pushed developers outward in their search for home sites.

The side effects—rarely noted in crusades for more "open space" but widely rec-

See SPRAWL, A14, Col. 1



BY JASON REED—REUTERS

On the Way to Kuwait

Army Sgt. Maj. Patrick Boykin of the 101st Airborne Division writes a message on an American flag during his flight from Fort Campbell, Ky., to Kuwait. Thousands of soldiers and crucial equipment are arriving in the desert nation. Story, Page A23.

Battles' Bitter Revelations

From France to Kuwait, Wars Change, but Not the Lessons

By DAVID MARANISS and ANNE HULL
Washington Post Staff Writers



MADEIRA BEACH, Fla. — The veterans of Bay Pines VA Medical Center who

U.S. Steps Up Pressure At U.N.

White House Pursues Authorization of War

By PETER SLEVIN
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Bush administration prepared a final diplomatic push yesterday to prevent the U.N. Security Council from defeating a resolution authorizing military action against Iraq, even as teams throughout the government focused on the increasing likelihood of war.

Advisers mobilized as President Bush charged anew that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is violating U.N. disarmament demands in a "willful charade." He declared in his weekly radio address that the Iraqis are continuing "to play a shell game."

"We are doing everything we can to avoid war in Iraq," Bush said, "but if Saddam Hussein does not disarm peacefully, he will be disarmed by force."

Senior administration officials said yesterday that they would be stunned if Hussein satisfied a U.S.-British-Spanish demand to surrender his most dangerous weapons by March 17. A top official said, "He would have to roll out things so fast that the inspectors would have to say, 'Whoa! We can't count all of that so fast.'"

As a Security Council showdown neared after weeks of increasing bitterness and division, the United States and

See IRAQ, A22, Col. 1

■ Saudis demand democratic

War on Sprawl

More than half of the land around the nation's capital is designated as "rural" or otherwise protected from conventional suburban development by rules limiting home builders to no more than one house for every three acres. While these restrictions are supposed to stop sprawl, critics point out that what they often yield is a more expensive version of sprawl, with big homes on big lots.

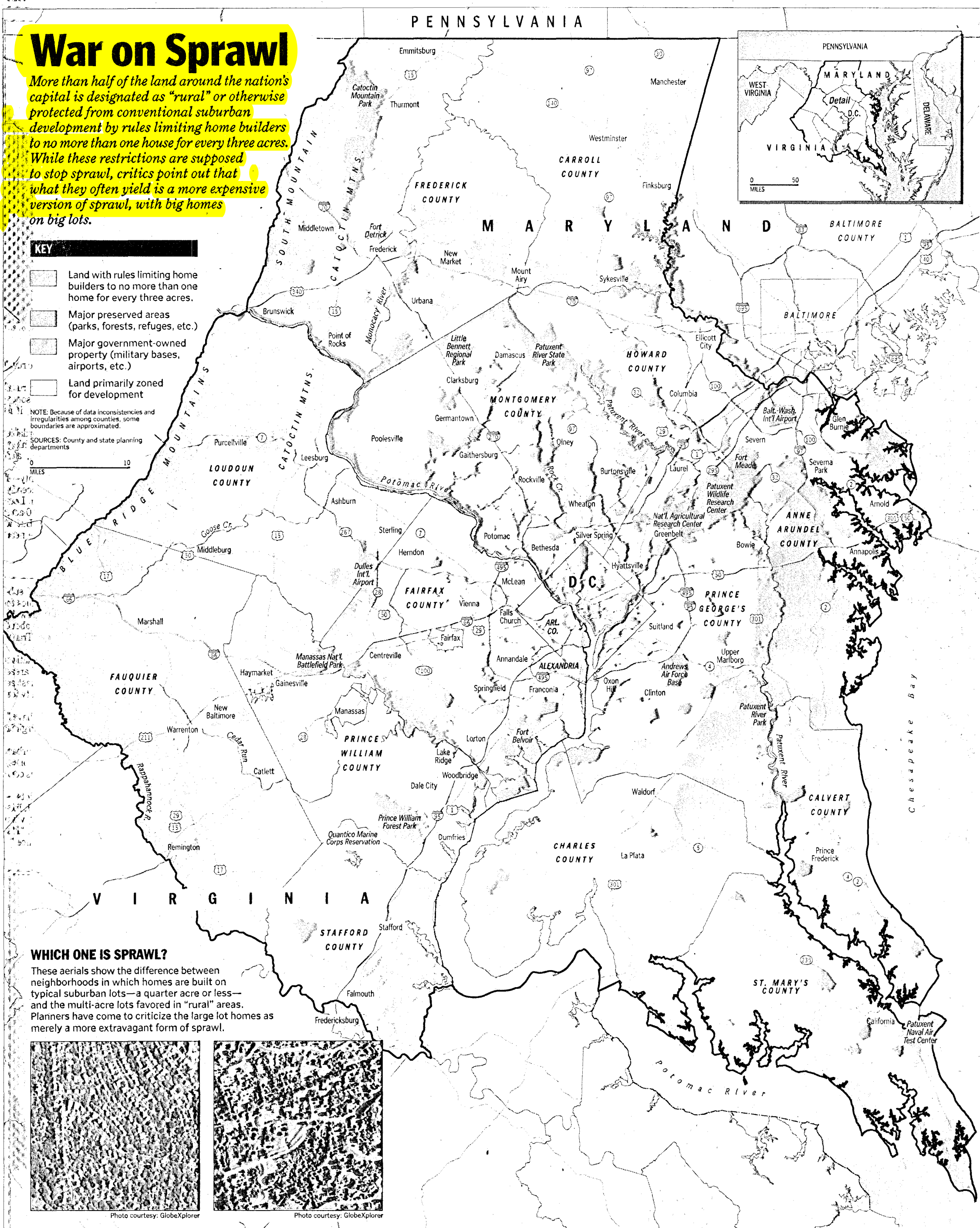
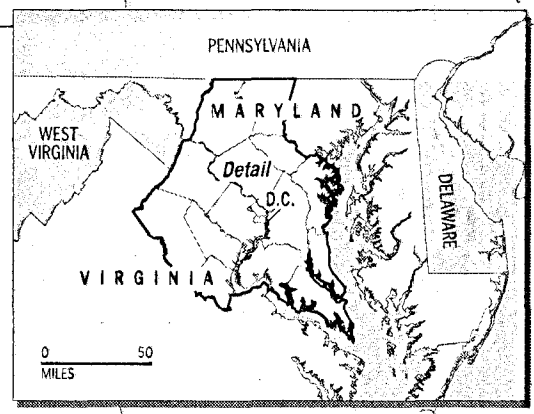
KEY

- Land with rules limiting home builders to no more than one home for every three acres.
- Major preserved areas (parks, forests, refuges, etc.)
- Major government-owned property (military bases, airports, etc.)
- Land primarily zoned for development

NOTE: Because of data inconsistencies and irregularities among counties, some boundaries are approximated.

SOURCES: County and state planning departments

0 10 MILES



WHICH ONE IS SPRAWL?

These aerials show the difference between neighborhoods in which homes are built on typical suburban lots—a quarter acre or less—and the multi-acre lots favored in "rural" areas. Planners have come to criticize the large lot homes as merely a more extravagant form of sprawl.

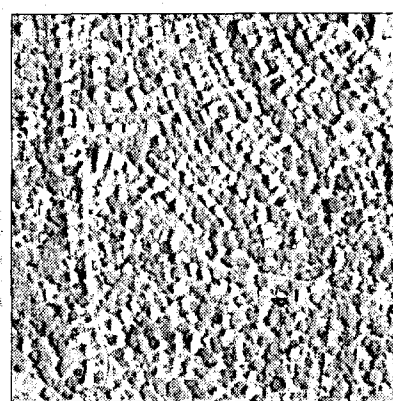


Photo courtesy: GlobeXplorer



Photo courtesy: GlobeXplorer

Area's Growth Limits Send Builders Farther Out

SPRAWL, From A1

ognized by regional planners—are twofold.

First, limiting construction to one house per three acres, or five or even 25, doesn't necessarily stop development. It just spreads it out, creating enclaves of estates in "rural" preserves, or what critics call "Gucci sprawl."

Half of the new houses built in St. Mary's County during the 1990s, for example, sit on "rural" lots averaging about six acres, just one of which could have accommodated 30 homes under typical suburban zoning. Likewise, in Prince William's "rural crescent," county officials are encouraging construction of 10-acre estates, while in Montgomery's "agricultural reserve," where rules generally permit one home per 25 acres, more than 700 houses are approved for development.

Second, even when restrictions are severe enough to halt residential development in one place, Washington's burgeoning population continues to demand new houses, so builders simply go elsewhere, usually farther out.

Recent limitations in western Loudoun County, for example, have helped push builders into West Virginia, while developers in Montgomery have migrated to Frederick and Washington counties in Maryland.

"As I drive home every day to West Virginia, I go by houses in western Loudoun that must cost \$500,000 or \$1 million in the rural area," said David Gillette, 39, who commutes to WorldCom in Ashburn. "We laugh because we have to drive by the snobs just to get to work. These houses are on 10-acre or 20-acre lots. Who can afford that?"

The movement to protect land extends outward from the region's most populous jurisdictions. Montgomery

has saved 140 square miles, nearly a third of its area, in its agricultural reserve. Fairfax County has set aside 62 square miles in its Occoquan Watershed, and Prince George's County has about 170 square miles in its "rural tier."

To understand how much these restrictions can extend sprawl, consider: All of the housing built during the '90s in the counties entirely outside the Capital Beltway could have been accommodated on about a third of the land in Montgomery's 90,000-acre reserve.

Scientists blame sprawl for some of the region's most persistent problems, including traffic jams, smog days and the decline of the Chesapeake Bay.

Despite the emergence of growth restrictions, however, key indicators of sprawl—auto travel per capita and land consumption rates—show few signs of abating, according to transportation and land planning experts.

As a result, it isn't just developers who find fault with the housing restrictions; some environmentalists and planners, two groups often assumed to favor building limits, are raising questions, too.

"Carving up land into three-acre lots, five-acre lots, even 10-acre lots—these are homes that consume an awful lot of land," said Lee Epstein of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, a leading anti-sprawl group. "They may be prettier, but they aren't saving forests and farmland, they're fragmenting it."

Adds Bruce Katz, a Brookings Institution expert on development: "If you have each county limiting development, it's going to jump elsewhere. . . . The growth is already leaking out over the agricultural reserve in Montgomery County. Look at Frederick. Look at Howard."

"Rural crescent" is a misnomer for the 125 square miles that Prince William has set aside, said Chris Miller,

president of the Piedmont Environmental Council, another major anti-sprawl group. "It might better be called the 'mini-estate crescent.'"

Regulatory Patchwork

Efforts at protecting open land grow out of a planning philosophy known as "smart growth," which holds that housing should be directed into compact, efficient nodes close to job centers. Theoretically, this reduces auto travel and land consumption while preserving outlying land in a natural state. The most frequently cited example is Portland, Ore., which maintains an urban growth boundary, outside of which building is sharply limited.

Unlike Portland, however, the Washington area has little regional land planning. More than a dozen counties independently draw growth boundaries, and the result is a regulatory patchwork.

Montgomery created its agricultural reserve in 1980, limiting development to one house per 25 acres; Fairfax followed in 1982, cutting development to one house per five acres in its Occoquan area.

The trend now covers the region: Two-thirds of Loudoun was recently limited to no more than one house per 10 acres (in some places, 20 acres); more than half of Howard County is designated as rural, with home builders limited to one house per 4.25 acres. Farther out, counties such as Frederick in Maryland and Fauquier in Virginia have put more than 75 percent of their land outside standard suburban densities.

"The fact that so many other counties are copying what we have done suggests that we have done something worthwhile," said Derick P. Berlage of the Montgomery County Planning Board.

To assess the scope of these efforts, The Post re-

viewed land-use plans in 14 counties stretching from the Chesapeake in the east to the Rappahannock River in the west. Included were Fairfax, Prince William, Loudoun, Stafford and Fauquier counties in Virginia, and Montgomery, Prince George's, Charles, Calvert, Anne Arundel, Howard, Carroll, Frederick and St. Mary's in Maryland.

Of the slightly more than 6,000 square miles in these counties, more than half—3,300 square miles—has been designated as protected, with building limited to no more than one house per three acres.

Planners in major U.S. cities indicated that the Washington region is alone in the extent of its low-density limits.

"That's a lot of land—but I don't think you can really say that it's protected," said Marc Draisen, director of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council in Boston. "What those restrictions really do is encourage development in a land-hungry manner."

Spread of Large Lots

While experts such as Draisen say such policies can accelerate sprawl, counties have embraced them for a simple reason: On a local level, they work—at least temporarily.

The momentum to enact growth limits often emerges during times of rapid, seemingly rapacious development. The doubling of Loudoun's population during the '90s, for example, spurred its ambitious growth restrictions.

Builders facing such limits respond in one of three

See SPRAWL, A15, Col. 1

Large Lots Eating Up Rural Land

SPRAWL, From A14

ways.

Some look for sites outside the county where rules may be more permissive and land cheaper.

Some build exactly where "smart growth" planners want new construction, in areas already slated for roads and other services.

And some carve their land into large lots, as required by the development limits, and build very expensive homes. Though environmentalists often frown on this as just a more extravagant form of sprawl, it does hold some financial and aesthetic appeal. Five-acre, \$700,000 estates look better than new townhouses, many neighbors believe, and they tend to bulk up public coffers: Their owners pay more in taxes than they demand in government services.

The tax angle might seem a minor point, but it is critical in places such as Loudoun, where planners figured that a single-family home worth less than \$439,000 doesn't pay its way.

"We are somewhat tired of having to build a classroom every week to keep up with growth in the county," said Scott K. York (R-At Large), chairman of the Loudoun Board of Supervisors. "People cannot afford to have their taxes go up to build school after school."

Many planners in the region who have helped craft the home-building limits acknowledge the potential for sprawling side effects.

Homes on large lots "are a primary source of sprawl and environmental degradation," according to a 2002 report from the Maryland Department of Planning, a leader in "smart growth" thinking.

The report further indicates that roughly twice as much land in the state is being consumed by residential development in "rural" and other preservation areas as in designated growth areas—in part because the rural lots are so much bigger.

Despite those results, planners defend the limits in rural areas, saying they need to be stricter—less dense than one house per 20 acres, maybe—and more widespread. That, planners have maintained, might really force developers to build in designated growth areas.

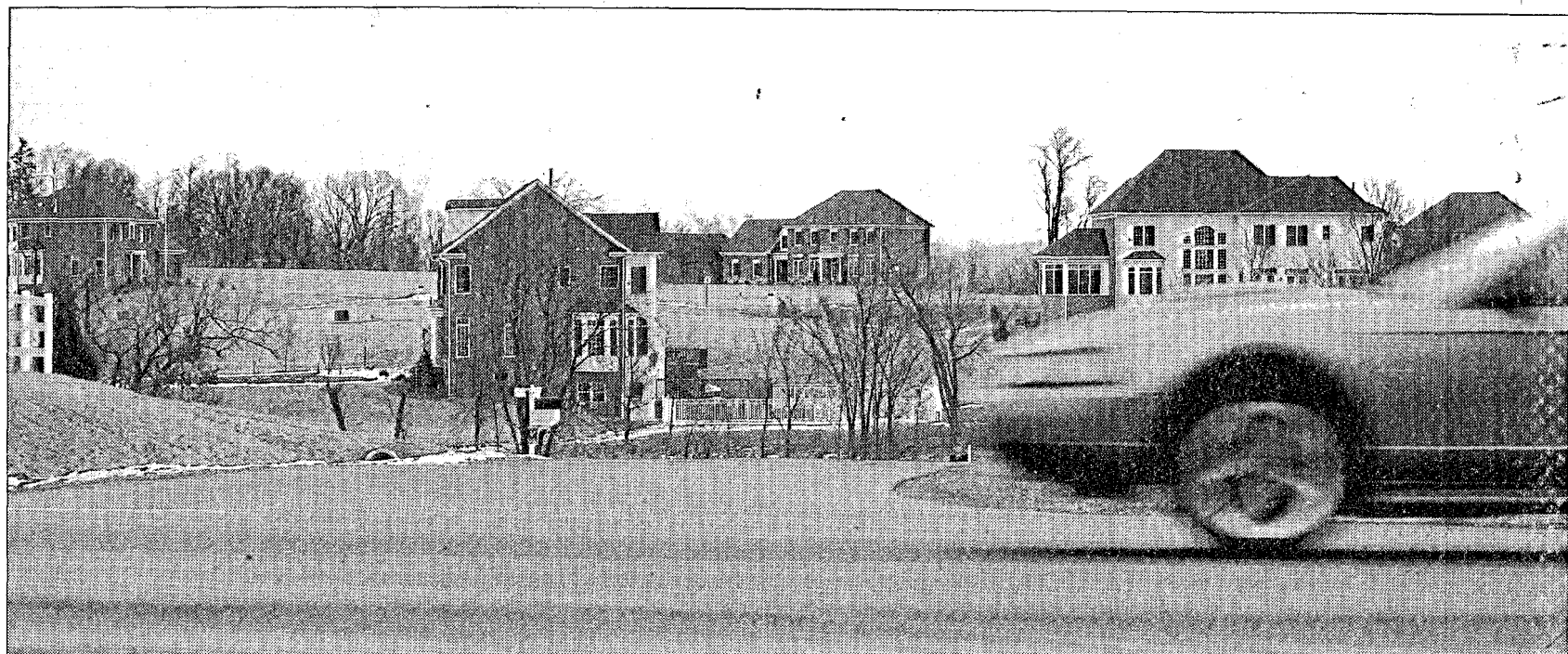
"You put a couple of 10-acre estates next to one another and you do have a lot of green space," said Audrey E. Scott, Maryland's new secretary of planning. "But that is not agricultural preservation. . . . We have a long way to go."

Unfulfilled Aims

So far, the limits haven't achieved their loftiest goals: They haven't stopped the loss of farmland, they haven't stopped sprawl and, according to real estate studies, they've helped push real estate prices out of the reach of many.

The majority of the land protection plans are supposed to promote farming, but agriculture in the region has continued its steady decline.

Montgomery's agricultural reserve stands as a good example because it was established more than 20 years



BY RICKY CARIOTI—THE WASHINGTON POST

In the Waterford Glen community in western Loudoun, houses start at \$550,000. Such prices have pushed affordable housing west, to places as distant as Charles Town, W.Va.

ago and boasts some of the strictest development limits. Yet in each of the last four Census of Agriculture reports, the amount of county land in farms has dropped—from 106,000 acres in 1982 to 77,000 acres in 1997, the most recent of the federal surveys.

"These are pastoral landscapes that have more of an emotional than a practical meaning," said Marya Morris, a senior researcher at the American Planning Association. "But if you can't make money farming them, people have a right to ask 'What's the point?'"

Moreover, despite Montgomery's strict home-building limits, developers have not been idle.

Bruce Wooden farmed hundreds of acres in the county—120 his own, the rest sharecropped—for about 30 years. A few years ago, he decided it was time to develop.

A grandfather clause in the one-home-per-25-acres restriction allowed him to build eight homes. Neighbors across the road propose to build 33, and on the other side, 10 more are in planning.

"M-O-N-E-Y," Wooden said. "There is a lot of demand to live out here. A few people, very few, are making a little money on farming. But I see a lot of it going into small estates, hobby farms."

Counties with laxer building restrictions see even more rural land lost to small estates.

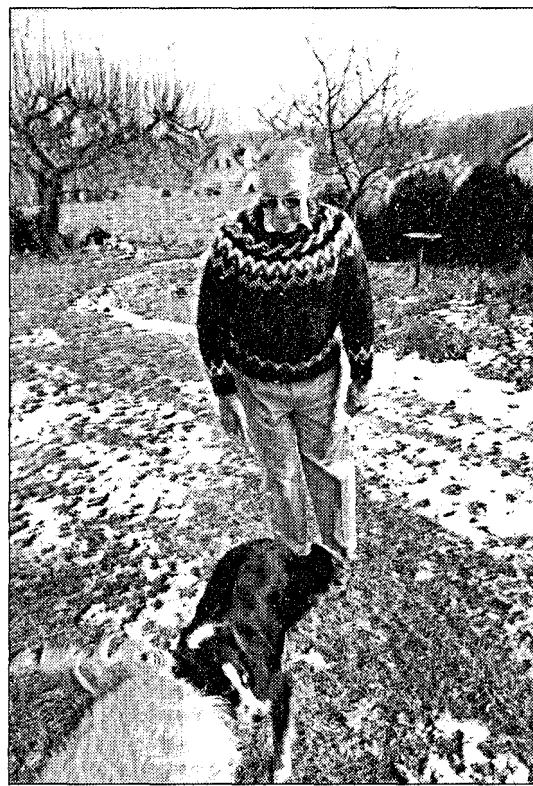
"From what we understand, the 10-acre lots in our rural area are one of the hottest-selling types in the market," said Sean T. Connaughton (R-At Large), chairman of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors, adding that he welcomes the trend. "To have a healthy community, you need to have homes in every price range."

Shortage of Housing

Efforts to limit home development, meanwhile, coincide with a well-documented housing shortage in the region.

During the 1990s, the failure to build housing fast enough to keep up with job growth led to a deficit of 43,200 residential units, according to George Mason University's Center for Regional Analysis.

The home-building limits have contributed to the shortage and are driving up housing costs, economists



BY LUCIAN PERNINS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Bruce Wooden once farmed hundreds of acres in Montgomery. Then he decided to start developing. "You can make 10 times what you would farming," he said.

say.

"If you restrict supply in the face of growing demand, and if the supply is less than demand, you are going to have higher housing prices," said Chris Nelson, a planning professor at Virginia Tech and co-author of a study on the subject.

To compensate for development limits on rural land, a few counties have raised the number of homes permitted

elsewhere. But in no case have they made up for the rural land's full development potential.

"It's sensible to stop development out in some rural places," Nelson said. "But you've got to put it somewhere else because, whether they want it or not, it is coming."

Rising prices add to sprawl by pushing affordable housing farther out, to places as distant from Washington as Hagerstown, Md., Charles Town, W.Va., and York, Pa.

"I'd have loved to have lived in Loudoun County—I just can't afford it," said Jonathan Howard, who recently moved to Charles Town and commutes to eastern Loudoun. "I'm sympathetic to the zoning there for 10-acre and 20-acre lots, because it's beautiful there. But it comes at the expense of people who want to live near where they work."

Conspicuous Consumption

One of the most frequently cited measures of suburban sprawl, automobile travel per capita, continues to rise. From 1990 to 2000, the area's population grew 15 percent, while the number of miles traveled grew about 27 percent, according to figures from the Texas Transportation Institute.

Similarly, land consumption is outpacing population growth, studies show. In the 1990s, the developed areas in suburban Virginia grew nearly three times as fast as the population; in Maryland, they grew more than twice as fast.

"We're just consuming more land than we ever have," said Gary T. Johnson, a planning professor at Virginia Commonwealth University planning professor.

Without additional incentives for building in urban areas, and more obstacles to building in rural zones, many foresee only more sprawling and conspicuous consumption.

"Developing homes on 3-, 10-, 15-, 20-acre lots—they're all just variations on the same theme. I call it lifestyle zoning," said Ed Risse of Synergy Planning, who has worked for developers and environmentalists. "It's not good planning. It's just the path of least resistance."