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# Fairfax County wants to help small manufacturers grow into new areas. Here's how.

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## Key story highlights:

**Fairfax County is taking steps to encourage the growth of a small-scale manufacturers through its "Made in Fairfax" initiative.**

**The county is working on a new zoning ordinance that would allow small-scale production businesses to set up shop in most of the county's retail and office districts.**

**Fairfax is also conducting a study to identify the best possible locations and analyze how the businesses can be integrated into commercial districts.**



### FAIRFAX COUNTY

Fairfax County is known more for its Fortune 500 companies than its manufacturing base. But the company's new initiative, "Made in Fairfax," is trying to encourage small-scale artisan producers to set up shop in aging retail developments or new mixed-use projects.

Fairfax County is known more for its stock of Fortune 500 companies than its manufacturing base. Leave large-scale production to the Carolinas, states that throw incentive packages to equipment makers like Caterpillar and Boeing.

But in recent months, the county has taken steps to attract and foster the growth of small-scale manufacturing businesses through a new initiative called "Made in Fairfax." It's part of a larger goal by county officials to recruit new manufacturers and help existing ones expand into new mixed-use developments or vacant commercial space in areas such as Annandale, Springfield, Seven Corners, Baileys Crossroads and the Richmond Highway corridor.

The most significant part of Made in Fairfax is a proposed zoning ordinance that would allow small-scale production establishments to set up shop in most of the county's office and retail districts. The zoning ordinance will be considered by the Planning Commission on Oct. 25, to be followed by a vote of the Board of Supervisors, said [Carmen Bishop](#), a planner with the county's Department of Planning and Zoning.

Currently, Fairfax County's zoning rules limit any kind of manufacturing to certain industrial districts and the Tysons Corner urban district, she said.

"We would like to add a definition for a small-scale production establishment," Bishop said. "It would be crafted broadly enough to include any type of production. That would include small-scale manufacturing. It also could include farming."

The zoning ordinance would also permit uses such as education or training programs to be conducted at a production site. "All of that is baked into the definition," she said.

If passed, the only areas where manufacturing would be excluded are districts dominated by residential, she said.

The zoning ordinance would allow producers to occupy about 6,000 square feet in retail and office districts, but Bishop said there is wiggle room in terms of how large a manufacturer's space could be. "That's a discussion we will have with the community. What is the right size?" she asked. "Maybe they can go larger with a special exception."

### **Manufacturing 'cool factor'**

Small-scale manufacturing is in the midst of a "renaissance" across the country, said Ilana Preuss, a national consultant and founder of Recast City, which is working with the county on Made in Fairfax. It's an industry creating strong middle-income jobs and a "cool factor" in commercial developments, she said.

"You can look through a storefront and see a chocolatier making the chocolate bars that are going to be shipped out across the region, or around the country or internationally," Preuss said. "It could be a robotics firm prototyping a new robot. It could be a textile company that is creating custom shirts or handbags that they are selling as well."

For a study that will be completed late this year, Preuss is helping Fairfax create a database of more than 100 such businesses already in the county and identify specific areas where the companies could open. "How can we bring together these small business

owners with the property owners to create these vibrant, great areas in our commercial districts?" she said.

Jason Phillips, a senior vice president with Bethesda developer The Meridian Group, said he sees potential to incorporate a local custom manufacturer or craft jeweler into the second phase of The Boro, a 4.2 million-square-foot project in Tysons.

"We think there are opportunities in these next phases to be less food-centric and more artistic," Phillips said. "There's a part of us that sort of wants some very big name brands to have that comfort level with consumers. But on the other hand, they love the discovery of interesting shops or interesting retail experiences that they can't see at the mall. We would love to mix that in with the comfort level of these places people are familiar with and know, and sprinkle in those little things that they don't know."

Meanwhile, Ran Farmer, lead investor in a 3-D printing shop called 3D Herndon, said he would consider moving his company from a 2,800-square-foot stand-alone building to a larger space in Fairfax County, such as an aging retail facility that could offer lower rent.

Doing so would provide much needed room to grow his staff of four full-time employees. The firm's revenue is expected to double in 2019 to \$2 million, as it produces prototype parts for machines, pharmaceutical and dental packaging and components for high-tech engineering and defense products, among other items.

"We're bursting at the seams so we are trying to think of what to do next," Farmer said. "We're looking for a 5,000 to 10,000-square-foot space."

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