South County Federation Resolution
Approved by Vote of 39 to 0
July 14, 2009

Oppositing the Current Draft Master Plan for Adaptive Reuse of the Lorton Prison Complex Unless and Until Certain Changes Made

Whereas pursuant to the Lorton Technical Corrections Act of 1998, the D.C. Department of Corrections facility at Lorton ("Lorton prison") was closed in 2002 and land encompassing the prison complex (2,324 acres) was transferred to Fairfax County;

Whereas the closure of the Lorton prison complex and the turnover of the federal land to Fairfax County created new opportunities to revitalize the South County area, which now includes a new South County secondary school, a new Laurel Hill elementary school, an approved site for a new South County middle school, a new Laurel Hill golf course, and hundreds of acres of new Laurel Hill Park facilities and recreation areas;

Whereas the transfer designated two adaptive reuse areas, one at the former workhouse site, and one at the former reformatory (Central) and penitentiary (Maximum) site;

Whereas adaptive reuse seeks to balance the competing demands of historic preservation, community preferences and economic viability for the property;

Whereas the County received and approved an unsolicited proposal from the Lorton Arts Foundation to create a cultural arts center at the workhouse site, which has been and continues to be adaptively reused as the Workhouse Arts Center at Lorton;

Whereas the remaining adaptive reuse area, comprising the central reformatory, and maximum security penitentiary, has been the subject of numerous planning processes over the past decade;

Whereas the Laurel Hill Adaptive Reuse Citizens Task Force was formed in 2003 to study and make recommendations to Fairfax County on how best to adaptively reuse the buildings and land located at the central reformatory and maximum penitentiary site;

Whereas in November 2004, the Citizens Task Force, comprised of representatives from throughout Fairfax County voted unanimously for a series of recommendations that called for a mixed use development to include residential, commercial and retail uses;

Whereas the Citizens Task Force recommendations were presented to and unanimously adopted by the Board of Supervisors on December 10, 2004;

Whereas the Board of Supervisors at their December 10, 2004 and February 7, 2005 meetings unanimously approved additional motions to begin moving forward with the Task Force's recommendations immediately, starting with the preparation of a Request for Interest based on the recommendations as well as the creation of a Project Advisory Committee to ensure faithful implementation of the recommendations, transparency and continued community input to the development process;

Whereas a Request for Interest (RFI) was issued in March 2005 and a subsequent Request for Proposal (RFP) was issued in July 2006 to determine if there were viable and acceptable proposals that met the recommendations of the Citizens Task Force and were economically feasible;

Whereas the County received 16 responses to the RFI but only two responses to the RFP proposal, and after a selection committee review concluded in January 2007 that both proposals were unacceptable because they "lacked key financial information" and "conflicted with the Comprehensive Plan and previous task force recommendations;"

Whereas the County, with the support of the Project Advisory Committee, issued an RFP to secure the services of a qualified master developer to develop a master plan for the adaptive reuse site;

Whereas the Alexander Company, which has expertise in redeveloping historic properties, including National Park Seminary located in Silver Spring, Maryland, was selected and contracted in 2008 to develop a new master plan;

Whereas the Alexander Company conducted numerous public meetings throughout 2008 and into 2009 to ensure full citizen and stakeholder participation during their master planning process;

Whereas the Alexander Company developed a proposed master plan, and following additional public input, modified that plan to reflect a number of concerns expressed by the community and stakeholders;

Whereas the master plan concept proposed by Alexander calls for a mixed use development of retail, office and residential development, including new residential construction and magnet/workforce housing;

Whereas the Alexander proposal echoes the same core concept of mixed use development that was previously proposed by an expert panel from of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), by the Citizens Task Force working with a professional planning consultant (EDAW), and which has been endorsed by Board of Supervisors and the Project Advisory Committee;

Whereas the Alexander Company's latest iteration of the proposed master plan seeks to balance the competing demands of historic preservation, community preferences, and economic viability and sustainability in order to achieve adaptive reuse of the former Lorton prison property;

Whereas the latest version of the proposed master plan contains new details on the financing needed to make the plan viable, which includes a heavy reliance on federal and state historic preservation tax credits, federal low-income housing tax credits, and direct funding by Fairfax County;

Whereas the latest version of the proposed master plan effectively changes the proposed magnet/workforce housing into federally subsidized low-income housing that could not be reserved for Fairfax County workers with modest incomes;

Now Therefore, Be It Resolved, That,

The South County Federation does **not** support moving forward with the proposed master plan for adaptively reusing the former Lorton prison at this time for the following reasons:

1) The Federation has serious questions about the financial viability and sustainability of the proposed master plan, specifically the reliance on federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, unsubstantiated estimates of historic preservation tax credits, and uncertainty about the level of financial contribution that the County will be able to afford in today's tight fiscal environment;

2) The Federation does not support the substitution of federally-subsidized, low-income housing for the proposed magnet/workforce housing that was planned to benefit important components of the County's workforce, a proposal that was unanimously recommended by the Task Force, adopted by the County and supported by the Federation; and

3) The Federation is not satisfied with the proposed mix of new housing units, which must be significantly changed in a manner that offers different types of housing (single detached, duplex and traditional townhome) and adds more visual variety and style of appearance, as is normally proposed and consistent with other new developments in the South County area.

Further Resolved, that the South County Federation, in the interest of moving forward with a viable and sustainable adaptive reuse plan that balances the competing demands of historic preservation, community preference and economic viability, supports:

1) The plan's overall land use mix of retail, commercial and residential, including the construction of new residential, subject to the reservation above:

2) The plan's proposal to create a multi-use public green at the current ball field location provided another suitable ball field in this area is secured; and

3) The plan's proposal to remove portions of the penitentiary wall in order to open up the site to public view and encourage people into the site, which will help promote economic success and create more opportunities for citizens to see, learn about and appreciate the unique history of the Lorton prison complex.

Further Resolved that in order to ensure success of this plan, the Federation calls on the County to:

1) Conduct an independent financial and economic analysis of this and any future proposed master plan to ensure that the project is both viable in the near term and sustainable for the long term; and

2) Conduct a thorough review of all available contracting options, including competitive bidding, before reaching an agreement with a master developer for the project.

Further Resolved that the County, the Alexander Company and any other developer chosen to implement this or future adaptive reuse plans must continue to seek and make good faith efforts to incorporate additional community input throughout the remaining development process in order to further refine and improve the plan.

Further Resolved that copies of this resolution be forwarded to all appropriate public officials and community organizations.

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