

# Laurel Hill Adaptive Reuse Citizens Task Force Executive Summary

December 2004

## **A Planning Vision for the Reformatory and Penitentiary site at Laurel Hill**

For the better part of a century, the use of one of the most beautiful parcels of land in Fairfax County, more than 2,700 acres, was restricted, and to an extent, hidden from public view. The land belonged to the federal government and contained facilities that housed prisoners for the District of Columbia. In 2002, the facilities and the land were transferred to the County. What was once known as a place of despair for many became a site of great promise with the County's vision for a new and unique beginning. This beginning was given the new name of Laurel Hill.

In the process of bringing new life and promise to these areas, our recommendations will accomplish the following:

- Preserve the essential historical core (both physical and symbolic) of the Workhouse and Reformatory/Penitentiary sites;
- Minimize the present and future financial burden on the taxpayers;
- Promote socially positive and acceptable reuses that compliment other development on site and in the surrounding community;
- Provide flexibility and transparency in the actual development process and
- Permit adaptive reuse of Laurel Hill into something of far-reaching significance and consequence – both exciting and uplifting.

During the past two years, the Laurel Hill Adaptive Reuse Citizens Task Force has reviewed many possible uses for the Reformatory and Penitentiary sites. The task proved to be complex as well as challenging. Nevertheless, the Task Force believes the recommendations outlined in this Executive Summary and more fully described in the accompanying Task Force report will transform the Reformatory and Penitentiary areas into the hub of a new community that not only includes artistic, educational and recreational venues at Laurel Hill, but compliments the surrounding communities as well.

The Task Force is confident that its vision presented in the recommendations below will allow the Reformatory and Penitentiary areas to contribute to the positive transformation of Laurel Hill into a world – class asset, becoming the jewel in Fairfax County's crown.

## Concept Description

The recommended concept for the reuse and redevelopment of the Reformatory and Penitentiary areas includes the coordinated development of these areas for a mix of educational, professional office, residential, including magnet housing and village center. The amount of development associated with residential units, retail and education space is illustrative of the recommended scenarios and is subject to amendment during the Comprehensive Plan or development process.

**Reformatory** could include the rehabilitation of the existing quadrangle for a range of magnet and market rate housing ranging from 50 to 125 loft type residential units. This housing should be contained within the existing structures with exterior modifications as necessary to meet the requirements of this use. The magnet housing units should be developed as an ancillary use to other uses within the Reformatory and Penitentiary areas and surrounding education, cultural and other public uses. The units are envisioned to provide housing to professionals such as educators and public safety specialists.

**Village Center** could include a range of 40,000 square feet to 60,000 square feet of retail, small professional office uses along the “Main Street”. In addition, the Village Center could incorporate loft type residential units within existing structures or as part of infill construction that is complementary to the existing architecture. The residential use could range from 10 to 30 units.

**Penitentiary** could include the rehabilitation of the existing quad for a range of education-related uses, supporting office and research facilities, and other uses. The education use could range in size from 50,000 to 125,000 square feet.

## Market Rate and Magnet Residential Units

The mix of loft-style market rate and magnet residential units is an opportunity to implement a viable reuse plan at the historically significant Reformatory site while providing ancillary support to adjacent uses at Laurel Hill and the surrounding area. The development of market rate units is an incentive for private investment in conjunction with the retail scenario of the village center. In addition, a combination of market rate and magnet housing is a project that could be privately funded.

Loft style magnet housing units should be used in support of an education or other scenario at the Penitentiary or in support of public employees such as school teachers, fire fighters and police trainees. The concept of assisting individuals in professional training for careers is based on extended residence of up to two years with training or educational opportunities available on site or nearby.

## **Alternative Scenarios Considered**

The Task Force explored many options to preserve the maximum number of contributing structures. Based on the outcome of these efforts, the Task Force learned that development and infrastructure costs may make some of the uses specified in the Comprehensive Plan out of reach for some development partners and create an undue burden on tax payers. In addition, market analysis indicated that the best opportunities to attract private development are residential, retail and professional office uses.

## **Conceptual and Phased Approach to Development**

The Reformatory and Penitentiary Area should be developed based on a coordinated development scenario as opposed to individual proposals seeking to use one or more structures. This will ensure compatibility among users and allow the development team to address issues affecting the entire 79-acre site through a coordinated plan.

A phased approach to adaptive reuse is recommended to allow the Reformatory and Penitentiary to be developed separately. This will reduce the scale and costs to potential development partners and the County, and increase the likelihood of rehabilitating contributing structures.

It is recommended that the Reformatory and Village Center area be developed as the first phase of a two-phase development process. Development of this area as the first phase would serve as an incentive for reuse of the Penitentiary, and serve as a hub of services that compliment the Laurel Hill Park areas, the Spring Hill senior center and the new and existing communities adjacent to Laurel Hill.

## **Historic Preservation**

In order to promote historic vision and synergy with other areas at Laurel Hill, the Task Force recommends adherence to the predominant historic themes when considering adaptive reuse strategies at all three adaptive reuse areas of Laurel Hill (Reformatory/Penitentiary, Workhouse and the senior community). The two predominant historic themes identified among the structures are the Progressive Era of prison reform and the Colonial Revival architecture of Snowden Ashford.

The Task Force also recommends the use of the document entitled *Relevance to Vision* when considering adaptive reuse strategies. The document identifies a hierarchy of structures by considering them in accordance with their adherence to the ideals of Progressive Era prison reform. *(Please see Appendix 9, Relevance to Vision. The document also is referenced in Section 5.4 of the Task Force recommendations.)*

Emphasis should be placed on rehabilitation of historically relevant structures for new uses. However, new construction may be necessary to address the needs of future users. New construction should be undertaken in a manner that is compatible and complementary to the existing character of the historic district.

## **Project Costs and Financial Considerations**

The cost of rehabilitation of historic buildings is typically higher than new construction. In addition, the other areas at Laurel Hill, including the Park Authority land and the Lorton Arts Foundation project at the Workhouse site anticipate a degree of financial support by Fairfax County. Given the overall commitment to Laurel Hill, the development of the Reformatory and Penitentiary areas should seek to minimize the taxpayer's financial participation and leverage that participation to create a viable, self-sustaining reuse scenario. Private or other investment should substantially support the development of the Reformatory and the Penitentiary.

### **Reformatory**

The Reformatory's residential and village center concept anticipates a total project cost of \$45 million, including infrastructure. Funding sources should include: Private investment; federal and state historic tax credits; tax exempt bonds, grants and other partnership opportunities through the Fairfax County Rehabilitation and Housing Authority; and public – private partnerships. Possible approaches to reducing project costs at the Reformatory include increasing the residential and/or retail component or reducing the number of structures that are reused.

### **Penitentiary**

The Penitentiary's education, supporting office, research concept anticipates a total project cost of approximately \$30 million, including infrastructure. Funding sources should include: Federal and state education funding; federal and state historic tax credits; and investment by accredited education partners. Possible approaches to reducing project costs at the Penitentiary include converting one or more buildings to residential use or reducing the number of structures that are reused.

Considering the complexity and potential costs related to developing the penitentiary area, it is important that Fairfax County not be the only government partner in the process.

### **Selection of Development Team**

The Task Force strongly recommends selecting development partners through a competitive process such as a Request for Proposal. The criteria for selecting a development team should include: experience with complex development projects and approval processes; track record of implementing financially sustainable projects; team partners with extensive historic rehabilitation experience; public-private partnership experience; and ability to limit county funding of the project.

If an education use is included within the proposal, the institution should be an accredited institution of learning, financially solvent and with a proven track record.

### **Lorton Arts Foundation – Financial Considerations**

The Lorton Arts Foundation is proposing a mix of arts, event spaces, residential and supporting food services. Specific market niches that L.A.F. is attempting to attract include hotel-banquet, museums, catering, visual arts and performing arts. These uses should be complemented by the development of the Reformatory and Penitentiary, but not replicated. The recommendations for the Reformatory/Penitentiary area avoid these specific uses because they would compete with L.A.F.

## **Project Organization and Schedule**

The County's investment in stabilization of contributing structures will provide a 5-year window of protection against further deterioration. The Task Force recommends accomplishing the following tasks during the five years in an effort to minimize the need for additional investment in stabilization:

### **Ongoing Years 1 – 5:**

**Stabilization:** Immediate implementation of building stabilization activities identified in the 2004 Facility Condition Assessment.

**Asbestos Abatement:** Prioritize asbestos abatement efforts to address the buildings and areas that are most likely to be reused in the near term.

### **Step 1**

**Laurel Hill Project Advisory Committee:** The Task Force recommends that the Board of Supervisors appoint a three-member citizens committee to monitor the development of the Reformatory and Penitentiary areas and ensure that the development process is objective and transparent.

**Comprehensive Plan:** Following review of the Task Force recommendations, the Task Force recommends that the Board of Supervisors authorizes an Out-of-Turn Plan Amendment to consider Comprehensive Plan changes that are necessary to support implementation of the master plan for the mixed use concept.

**Memorandum of Agreement:** The Board of Supervisors is requested to direct County staff to review any potential amendments to the Memorandum of Agreement that may be necessary to implement Task Force recommendations.

**Standards and Guidelines for the Lorton Prison Historic District:** The Task Force recommends completion of the draft standards and guidelines under development by the County's Architectural Review Board to facilitate a consistent review process of development proposals.

## **Step 2**

**Team Leader / Project Manager:** As soon as the Board of Supervisors has approved the Task Force recommendations (Winter 2005), the Task Force recommends that county move forward with a professional search for a Team Leader / Project Manager. The goal is to select this person by early 2005. The Team Leader / Project Manager should have experience managing complex development processes.

## **Step 3**

**REOI /RFP /RFQ process:** Once the Board of Supervisors has approved the Task Force recommendations, the Task Force recommends that the county move forward with a Request for Expression of Interest (REOI) for developing the Reformatory and Penitentiary areas. Target date for the submittals from the REOI is March 2005.

Based on the input from the REOI, the County should then proceed with a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) or a Request For Proposal (RFP) with submittals by Fall 2005. Evaluation and selection of a preferred development team is targeted to occur by the end of 2005.

Please see Section 5.6 under **Project Steps and Schedule** for information that should be included by respondents to the REOI and the RFQ/RFP.

## **Step 4**

**Development Agreement:** Once the development team has been identified, the County proceeds with the negotiation of a development agreement. The Task Force recommends the timeframe for establishing the development agreement should be six months from selection of the development team.

## **Contingency Planning**

If the County is not able to identify a qualified development team during the RFP/RFQ process (Step 3) for the reformatory or penitentiary phases of the project or both, it is recommend that the county consider amending the development scenario for either or both phases. Such amendments can include reducing the scope of an adaptive reuse strategy to incorporate fewer existing structures.

## **Special Considerations**

### **Memorandum of Agreement**

The Memorandum of Agreement was negotiated as part of the transfer of Laurel Hill from federal to county ownership. The MOA does not include representation of the county's master planning process for the adaptive reuse areas.

The Task Force recommends that Paragraph 10 of the Memorandum of Agreement should be amended to include the Laurel Hill Project Advisory Committee as a participant in the development of adaptive reuse strategies in the area designated as eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The Project Advisory Committee will represent the Board of Supervisors' approved master plan recommendations for the Reformatory and Penitentiary areas.

### **Architectural Review Board**

The Task Force recommends timely completion of the draft standards and guidelines currently under development by the County's Architectural Review Board to facilitate a consistent review process of development proposals. The Task Force urges the Board of Supervisors to send a letter to the Architectural Review Board formally requesting that the Architectural Review Board move forward with the adoption of these standards and guidelines.