

Submitted at public
hearing by
Patricia Nicoson

Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
Public Hearing on Proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment
To the Reston Master Plan, Item: ST09-III- UP1 (A)
Comments of Patricia Nicoson, Task Force Chairman
January 28, 2014

Good afternoon, Chairman Bulova and members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. My name is Patty Nicoson. I have chaired the Reston Master Plan Special Study Task Force since it was appointed by Hunter Mill Supervisor Catherine Hudgins in December 2009.

The 25-member task force, many of whose members were selected by business and community organizations, as well as the 16 alternate members consisted of dedicated residents and business leaders with considerable expertise in planning and development, as well as considerable experience in working to make Reston an even better place to live, work, play and get involved. Our focus was on the areas around the three transit station areas in Reston (Wiehle – Reston East, Reston Town Center and Herndon), and the area north of the existing Reston Town Center core, Reston Town Center North.

On November 12, 2013, the task force voted 15 in support, four opposed, and one abstention on the staff draft Reston Transit Station Areas Comprehensive Plan Amendment. I think most felt, as I did, that the plan built on the principles established by our founder Robert E. Simon and continued its emphasis on excellence in architecture and urban design; wide range of opportunities for full use of leisure time including cultural and recreational facilities; ability to live and work (and play and serve) in the community; enhancement of the natural environment and sustainable development practices; and the provision of housing opportunities for a broad range of household types.

The plan proposes mixes and intensities of development that will add transit-oriented development to our community capitalizing on the arrival of the Silver Line Metrorail extension. This rail link to the numerous employment, educational, cultural, and recreational assets of the Washington, DC region will benefit us and the region. We are looking forward to the opening of service soon.

The Draft Comprehensive Plan text evolved over nine months in 2013 as new information was provided. Staff, and in particular I want to recognize our very able lead planner, Heidi Merkel, were very responsive to issues raised by the task force members and others. When members proposed changes that were not incorporated into the text, staff have provided good explanations as to why not.

This was largely a task force-driven planning process. After staff presentations in 2010 on existing conditions at the three transit station areas and community meetings to brainstorm about visions for each, we organized subcommittees to get the planning work started. I appointed two co-chairs (one representing the development community and one a citizen) for each of the three subcommittees addressing the Wiehle-Reston East, Reston Town Center and Herndon (the portion south of the Dulles

Toll Road) transit station areas and the Reston Town Center North area, a 40-acre area north of the existing town center core which has only two owners so coordinated planning and development should proceed smoothly.

We also appointed a Vision subcommittee that had two citizen co-chairs. While the transit station area subcommittees focused on specific areas, the Vision subcommittee looked at the bigger picture and made corridor-wide recommendations. This committee developed a **"Vision and Principles Statement"** that was adopted by the full task force with some minor revisions on March 15, 2011. This statement was accompanied by a report that addressed urban design, including streets and open space, public art, place making and design of buildings; the environment with sections for each of the transit station areas; transportation which addressed pedestrian and bike access, transit options, and roadway improvements; and a section on public facilities, which was presented to the task on February 22 and March 15, 2011.

The Center for Regional Analysis, George Mason University, provided job and housing projections, which were revised as the study progressed to reflect the downturn in the regional economy. **We also brought in experts** who provided information on: demographic trends (which indicated an increasing demand for housing in walkable, transit-oriented communities particularly among millennial's, empty-nesters, and immigrant populations); ways transportation could be made to serve community building and place making; how to implement complete streets that accommodate all modes of transportation; and planners with experience in TOD in Montgomery and Arlington counties. The New York Times architectural critic Paul Goldberger spoke to us about the need for quality architecture and urban design and the role Reston could play as a regional activity center in the 21st century.

During the middle of the process, we created a Steering subcommittee that consisted of the co-chairs of the four subcommittees plus two additional members to help guide our planning process as we reviewed the recommendations of the various subcommittees. That committee worked to make the four sets of recommendations compatible with each other and to reach consensus on goals and objectives to provide staff with direction as they began to write plan text.

In November 2012, we formed an Ad Hoc subcommittee, the Writing Group, which began work on the task force's own report on the planning process, which is being finalized now. The first issue we tackled was what was to be required of development seeking the higher densities of uses that were being recommended for the transit station areas.

We wanted developers to be incentivized to provide some of the major amenities and transportation facilities we wanted such as a performing arts center, recreation center, major parks, crossings of the Dulles Toll Road, and affordable and workforce housing.

The Jobs/housing balance was an important issue for the task force throughout its work. Providing housing next to and near job sites reduces congestion on the roads. Residents in the transit station areas will have the opportunity to walk or bike to work, as well as take transit, reducing roadway trips and future congestion. This has been demonstrated nationally and in nearby Arlington. The proposed

plan with its increased emphasis on residential uses considerably improves this balance over the existing situation and results in Reston achieving an overall jobs housing balance of 2.5:1.

This plan provides a **different approach to density at the transit station areas**. The density is not tied to a specific parcel. Instead, a range of densities is proposed for the transit station mixed-use and residential mixed-use districts. Developers will need to demonstrate achievement of a number of performance objectives to reach the higher end of the range

Mix of Uses at the Transit Station Areas. The Transit Station Mixed-Use Areas, which are within one-quarter mile of the stations, require a 50/50 ratio of non-residential to residential square footage to enhance the vitality of development. (These areas were previously governed by restrictive covenants prohibiting hotel and residential, which were vacated effective 2011). Residential Mixed Use Areas (located roughly between one-quarter and one half-mile of the stations) are required to have an overall balance of 75/25 residential to non-residential square footage.

The Writing Group developed a statement, "**Achieving the Vision for Reston**", approved by the task force on February 26, 2013, which put forward the kinds of things we felt the community would want to see in exchange for increasing densities over those currently permitted. We proposed a **basic set of standards** for all development that included mitigating traffic impacts, excellence in architecture, contributions to the grid of streets, pedestrian connections, sustainable building design, workforce and affordable housing, and innovative parking strategies among others that needed to be provided to get approvals for densities at the lower ends of the range. **To reach the higher end of the development range**, we proposed that developers provide additional facilities, amenities, and infrastructure to help achieve the vision for Reston for the next 50 years. We also proposed that bonus densities be provided for elements that would bring significant, specific benefits to the community.

The draft Comprehensive Plan text section on Development Review Performance Objectives and bonus density reflects our recommendations and includes similar measures and requirements to achieve higher densities.

Staff also included the task force's Vision Statement and Planning Principles in the draft Comprehensive Plan text.

Transportation. County staff performed two transportation analyses for two different scenarios that were based largely on the subcommittee's recommendations. The second one, Scenario G, reduced the amount of permitted commercial development, increased the amount of residential development and focused development at the transit station areas. Scenario G reduced the average peak period intersection delay considerably below the existing COG Round 8.0-based land use projections.

Transportation improvements proposed to make the plan workable include: three additional crossings of the Dulles Toll Road in Reston (South Lakes, Soapstone, and Reston Town Center) and an additional one in the Route 28-Innovation Station area; a grade-separated intersection at Fairfax County Parkway and Sunrise Valley Drive, and grids of streets to serve as building blocks for more urban environments in the largely suburban office park complexes of today; an aggressive transportation demand

management program to reduce vehicular trips; and enhancement of Reston's pedestrian and bicycle system; a revised bus plan to provide more frequent service to the transit station areas, as well as circulation throughout the Reston community; and intersection improvements, upgrades to the signal systems, and parking management programs.

The plan text calls for monitoring the performance of the transportation system to maintain a balance between it and the land uses in the station area. The Planning Commission approved a motion that calls for the board to direct staff to conduct a detailed evaluation and operational analysis of the enhanced street network, to prioritize these improvements and develop an implementation strategy and another motion that would direct staff to develop an inclusive process to prepare a funding plan for transportation improvements that would include public financing and private investment.

Staff will be conducting additional analyses of the transportation system and developers will be required to submit additional transportation analyses along with their proposed plans.

The impacts of the proposed development on other community facilities were analyzed including: the school system, Fire Department, Police Department, water and sewer systems, and parks, recreation and open space. New facilities and improvements to existing facilities were recommended to address the impact of additional density.

To mitigate the impacts of additional jobs and residents, the plan requires that provision of infrastructure improvements be timed to serve the approved developments.

Urban Parks Standards. The County Board adopted an Urban Parks Framework in May 2013, which has been added to the County's Policy Plan. These urban parks standards were used in the planning for Reston.

Open spaces, parks, and recreational facilities are very important to the residents of Reston, as are our natural resources. They are what attracted many residents to move to Reston. The plan calls for major parks at each of the transit stations and in Town Center North, as well as a range of facilities to fulfill recreation needs. Being too rigid or prescriptive, may limit opportunities for such facilities. Based on its experience in Tysons, staff has said they prefer having some **flexibility** to work with property owners to plan for and implement facilities that go beyond requirements. There is a growing recognition on the part of the development community that parks, open space, and recreation facilities are assets. There are increasing examples of the innovative use of indoor and rooftop spaces for recreation.

The issue of having residents and property owners contribute financially to the provision of park facilities is of concern to many in the community. The proposed plan recommends that new developments in the transit station areas contribute to the Reston Association or the Reston Town Center Association

Implementation. The plan recognizes that a number of transportation improvements and major community amenities will need to have the funding support of private property owners. The plan lists a

variety of tools and strategies to implement the plan. The Planning Commission has approved motions that would help implement the plan. Once the plan is adopted, we look forward to working with County elected officials and staff to explore which mechanisms are appropriate to fund the desired facilities and programs in Reston.

The Planning Commission also approved a motion that asks the Board to direct staff to work with a group of stakeholders to review and make recommendations on how best to incorporate Reston-specific design features into future development, as outlined in the proposed plan.

The County has used proffers with great success to get a number of improvements funded. The task force recognized that a number of major facilities will require public, or a as well as private sector funding contributions. Our task in this effort was to set the vision for Reston and identify which uses and facilities were most important to achieving it.

Conclusion. The task force was a talented group and a pleasure to work with. We look forward to working with you and the County staff to implement the plan. We would like to see the area around the Wiehle Avenue station transformed as quickly as possible to take advantage of the opening of the rail station and create our first transit village. With adoption of the plan, we have a head start on making sure that TOD is in place in Reston Town Center and at the Herndon station when Phase 2 opens in 2017 or 2018.