

**Fairfax County Planning Commission**  
**Public Hearing on Proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment**

**To the Reston Master Plan, Item: ST09-III- UP1 (A)**

**Comments of Patricia Nicoson, Task Force Chairman**

**November 13, 2013**

Good evening, Chairman Murphy and members of the Fairfax County Planning Commission. 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 25 alternate members consisted of dedicated residents and business leaders with considerable expertise in planning and development, as well as experience in working to support our wonderful home, the place called Reston.

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; enhancement of the natural environment and sustainable development practices; the provision of housing opportunities for a broad range of household types. It also proposes mixes and intensities of development to take advantage of the opportunity we have for adding transit-oriented development to our community with the arrival of the Silver Line Metrorail extension. This link to the numerous employment, educational, cultural, and recreational assets of the Washington, DC region will benefit us and the region.

Over the last nine months, we have seen the Draft Comprehensive Plan text evolve as new information has been provided and staff have responded to issues raised by the task force members and others. Staff have been very responsive to our concerns and when proposed changes have not been incorporated into the text, have provided good explanations as to why not. Staff have benefited to a great extent from the experience it has gained in the Tysons planning effort.

**This was largely a task force-driven planning process.** After staff presentations on existing conditions at the transit station areas and community meetings to brainstorm about visions for each, we appointed two co-chairs to head up the three subcommittees that would deal with each transit station area: Wiehle-Reston East, Reston Town Center and Reston Town Center North, and Herndon (the portion south of the Dulles Toll Road).

We also appointed a Vision subcommittee that had two co-chairs. 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 with an eye to making them compatible with each other and to help staff provide a basis for beginning to write plan text.

While the transit station area subcommittees focused on specific areas, the Vision subcommittee look at the bigger picture and made corridor-wide recommendations. This committee also 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 address pedestrian and bike access, transit options and streets; and a section on public facilities, which was presented to the task on February 22 and March 15, 2011.

In November 2012, we formed an Ad Hoc subcommittee of the task force to begin work on the task force’s own report on the planning process. It is undergoing final edits now. The first issue we tackled was what was to be required of development seeking the higher densities of uses that were now being permitted at the transit station areas. This 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 that currently permitted. We proposed a set of basic standards for all development that included mitigating traffic impacts, excellence in architecture, contributions to the grid of streets, pedestrian connections, sustainable building designs, workforce of affordable housing, innovative parking strategies on others to get approvals for densities at the lower ends of the range. To reach the higher end of the development range, we proposed additional facilities, amenities, and infrastructure to help achieve the vision for Reston. We also proposed opportunities for bonus densities for elements that would bring large, specific benefits to the community.

The staff draft Comprehensive Plan text includes a section on Development Review Performance Objectives and bonus density that includes similar measures and requirements to those proposed by the task force.

Staff also included the task force’s Vision Statement and Planning Principles in the draft comprehensive plan text.

The Center for Regional Analysis, George Mason University, provided jobs and housing projections, which were revised as the study progressed to reflect the downturn in the regional economy. We 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 immigrants), ways transportation could be made to serve community building and place making; ways 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 the role Reston could play as a major activity center in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**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; grids of streets to serve as building blocks for more urban environments in the largely suburban office parks in place today; an aggressive transportation demand management program to reduce vehicle or 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. Staff proposes additional levels of analyses, for example of the grid of streets once the plan is approved by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.** Staff has gained a considerable experience with addressing transportation issues from work on the Tysons plan and can build on the previously completed Reston Metrorail Access Group Study recommendations. Developers will be required to submit additional a transportation analyses along with their proposed plans. Staff has demonstrated that **it and the plan require that infrastructure improvements be timed to occur with approved developments.** This include transportation improvements. The development of Reston Town Center has been predicated on achieving both trip reduction targets and on the provision of transportation improvements. The community can expect similar treatments of developments approved under this plan.

**Mix of Uses at the Transit Station Areas.** Scenario G calls for a robust 50/50 ratio of commercial to residential development to enhance the vitality of development within the Transit Station Mixed-Use Areas. (These are within one quarter mile of the transit station areas which previously were governed by restrictive covenants prohibiting hotel and residential). 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 commercial square footage.

**Jobs/housing balance** was an important issue for the task force. The approved scenario G 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.

**Bucket Concept.** In order to accommodate the varying situations among the transit station area properties, this plan amendment sets target by land-use districts (Transit Station Mixed Uses Area and Residential Mixed Use Area) not individual properties for residential and commercial development with the intent of encouraging higher intensities to develop earlier near the transit stations to take advantage of the opening of the Metrorail stations.

The impacts of alternative G on other community facilities were analyzed including: the school system, Fire Department, Police Department, water and sewer systems, and parks, recreation and open space.

**Urban Parks Standards.** As you know, 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 are now being used in transit station areas including in Reston and Tysons.

Recognizing the importance of open space and recreation to the residents of Reston, **I requested that a follow on motion be made to have additional work done to try to identify the types and possibly the locations of open space facilities in Reston.** Staff has noted that rather than being prescriptive, which may limit opportunities for such facilities, based on its experience in Tysons, they prefer having some flexibility to work with property owners on providing these facilities. In Tysons, developers have been willing to provide more than the requirements. They recognize that park facilities are assets.

The issue of having residents and property owners contribute financially to the provision of park facilities is addressed in the draft text which recommends that development in the transit station areas join 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. Once the plan is adopted, we can begin to work with County elected officials and staff to explore which mechanisms are appropriate to fund the desired facilities and programs in Reston. 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. **Once the plan is adopted, the next step is to begin work to achieve the vision through implementation.**

**Conclusion.** The task force was a talented group and a pleasure to work with. We look forward to working with the County to implement the plan. We would like to see the area around the Wiehle Avenue station transformed as quickly as possible to support the opening of the rail station early next year. We also recognize that for development to be in place in Reston Town Center and the Herndon station, planning for TOD should begin soon to be there when Phase 2 opens in 2018.