

General Reston Development Policies Related to the Wiehle Avenue Station Area

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There are many badly needed transportation and other types of public infrastructure improvements that are essential in order to allow the Wiehle Avenue Dulles Rail site and its immediate vicinity to function effectively in the future. The capital improvements program that is central to addressing these infrastructure needs must become an integral part of the new planning approach for Reston and the entire county. A supposedly “comprehensive” land use plan that focus only upon the physical relationship of the land uses is certainly not comprehensive, and it isn’t a complete and effective plan.. While this has been the traditional Fairfax County approach to planning, this simply won’t work from now on. Fairfax County plans must focus much more directly and aggressively upon how the physical plan is to be implemented, and specifically how we are going to pay for essential public facilities. This must no longer be an after-thought of the traditional Fairfax County plan that someone else will worry about later, but it must be a central element of the Comprehensive Plan process.

In an ideal planning environment, Fairfax County and other regional, state and federal governmental entities would provide the traditional funding resources that would implement these essential infrastructure improvements. As we have learned over many years of watching this process, the traditional ad hoc governmental approach to capital facility financing never seems to find enough money in a timely manner to accomplish necessary improvements. Therefore, over time, a severe and growing deficit accrues which can never be overcome. This method of ad hoc, crisis-driven funding allocation simply does not work.

Traditionally, Fairfax County has also relied upon “voluntary” proffers from developers to fund most immediate infrastructure needs. While each of the developers with a new project in the Wiehle Station area should be expected to contribute a fair and reasonable pro rata share to be devoted toward eventually implementing these improvements, the cost of making any one of the essential major improvements will often far exceed the amount that any one developer can reasonably be assessed. Therefore, a **Reston Core Infrastructure Escrow Fund** must be established as a mechanism by which sufficient funds can be collected from a variety of sources over time to eventually accrue sufficient funding to carry out these necessary improvements. Comstock Partners, as one immediate developer in this case, and all subsequent landowners / developers, must contribute an appropriate amount to this fund.

This proposed funding strategy introduced above, to be utilized throughout the Reston Core (Town Center and RCIG) area and its approaches, must be established by Fairfax County immediately as a radically new approach to assuring the future funding of a wide variety of important infrastructure improvements throughout the Reston Core area.

Also contributing to this fund should be a portion of Reston-wide funds raised via the existing Reston Small Tax District Five or some comparable community-wide source, and from some variation of a tax increment funding mechanism. All residents and businesses will benefit from new opportunities associate with Dulles Rail. All should pay a fair, pro rata share to finance needed future infrastructure. Via the latter approach, a portion of the increment of all future Fairfax County tax revenues that will have increased as the result of increased economic growth and property values resulting from new Reston transit-oriented development and from other new infrastructure projects should be earmarked for this Escrow Fund. Thus, as Dulles Rail contributes to the general well-being of Reston, a significant percentage of the new revenues Fairfax County will generate from new property and sales taxes and fees must be systematically reinvested in the Reston Core to ensure its continuing economic viability.

A formal capital improvements program mechanism must be established to systematically set priorities among all potential infrastructure improvement projects based both upon the cost effectiveness of the project and its essential timeliness. A capital improvements plan can then be established based upon these priorities and projected revenue forecasts to govern construction of subsequent infrastructure improvements.

Illustrative of the types of projects that might be part of a Reston capital improvements program might be the Soapstone Road extension and its associated bridge over the Dulles Highway recommended by the RMAG Study in 2008, This improvement was seen as an effective means of providing relief for the severe congestion found on Wiehle Avenue especially between Sunset Hills Road and Sunrise Valley Drive. It would specifically benefit feeder buses and pedestrians accessing the Wiehle Station. The current level of congestion is certain to be severely exacerbated as thousands of additional vehicle trips attempt to utilize this restrictive corridor during peak hours.

A subsequent grade-separated extension of this alternative Dulles Highway crossing might be built along Comstock Drive to cross Sunset Hills Road so as to connect with Isaac Newton Square and the W&OD Trail on the north side of Sunset Hills Road. This improvement would provide an effective grade-separated automobile / pedestrian / bicycle connection between the transit station and the W&OD Trail and development to the north of Sunset Hills Road. A grade separation of the W&OD Trail itself over Wiehle Avenue would represent another example of an important project that might be funded in this manner as soon as the Fund revenue balance and the project priority status allowed.

This approach must become an integral element of the Reston planning process from now on.

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