

DAE COMMENTS CONCERNING DEVELOPMENT OF RESTON TOWN CENTER

DRAFT

April 21, 2010

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The Town Center desperately needs to be viewed once again by the Reston community as a comprehensive unit rather than as a composite of the wide variety of separate and independent development sites. Each new element must be viewed in the context of its overall relationship to the other elements of the Center as this will manifest itself over an extended period of time. The Town Center and the current RCIG area must be considered as the **RESTON CORE**. Today, our Reston plan review process frequently looks only at free-standing, individual projects in their own right rather than as significant elements of the broader context. Instead of this approach we need to consider –

Questions that must be asked and then answered:

1. What are the overall approved development numbers that affect the future development of the Town Center and the Urban Core?

- What is the overall amount of square footage currently authorized for the Town Center as established by the Comprehensive Plan as it is currently written? Under both existing PRC and any other zoning categories? Is this overall development cap appropriate?
- What are the as-built or planned square footages of each of the already approved buildings or groupings of buildings on a project by project basis?
- What building heights are permitted by the current ordinance, and what are the existing building heights as-built? Are arbitrary building height limits necessary?
- What is the overall FAR limit that has been established and approved for the Town Center today?
- Within the overall Town Center development, how much additional development is still possible within currently approved limits?
- What is the inventory of pending development proposals already in the cue pending Fairfax County review that is seeking to utilize this remaining balance?

2. Is the current FAR limit appropriate? Necessary? If not, what, if any, FAR limit should there be?

3. Is the current Comprehensive Plan square footage cap necessary? Appropriate? Is any cap necessary? If so, what should it be?

4. If the current cap is appropriate as is, how should the remaining balance of potentially authorized development be allocated among present and future applicants?

5. Are current height restrictions appropriate? Are height limits necessary? How, if at all, should current height restrictions be modified?

6. The County-Inova controlled portion of the general Town Center area must be planned with a great deal of community input as an integral part of the overall Town Center. Fairfax County - Inova currently do not have an operable master plan or a formally specified vision for their portion of the Reston Town Center.

DAE Comments:

With respect to Questions 2, 3 and 4 above, the overall development density in the Reston Town Center should be limited only by the ability of the associated infrastructure, and the surrounding natural environment, to accommodate the growth. A cap or upper limit must not be arbitrarily assigned.

- 1. Are there public facility (infrastructure) limitations that must absolutely restrict future growth?**
 - **Transportation facilities**
 - **Water, sewer, storm water drainage and management**
 - **Schools and other public facilities and services**
 - **Other aspects of the environment**
- 2. If so, can these limitations / restrictions be overcome or adequately compensated for by some combination of public and/or private action?**
- 3. If so, by what actions and at what cost, paid for by whom?**

With respect to Question 5 above. Are current height restrictions appropriate? Are height limits necessary?

A comprehensive, three-dimensional urban design evaluation and planning approach is required here. Future planning for the Town Center must go far beyond the typical County two-dimensional, colors-on-a-map approach. Reston and County architectural review processes are already in place, but they are largely woefully inadequate. They must be vastly improved upon. What must be required is to view the entire Town Center and adjacent Core areas as a comprehensive three-dimensional architectural urban design system.

In general, significant tall building heights are not inherently bad in specifically designated areas such as the Town Center and the Dulles Corridor Urban Core that are well-removed from the nearest low density residential areas. Such architectural concerns as building shadow impact on adjacent areas and the avoidance of wind tunnel effects should limit building heights, placement, massing and configurations where appropriate. There should be no arbitrary limits imposed.

In many cases, a tall building that covers only half of the ground-level site area, thus allowing for more pleasant ground level plaza area, is far preferable to an equal building size but one with a much lower building profile that covers most of the allotted site area utilizing the same assigned FAR limitation.

With respect to Item 6 above. The County-controlled portion of the Town Center must be planned as an integral part of the Town Center. Fairfax County and Inova currently do not have an operable master plan or formally specified vision for their portion of the Town Center.

Fairfax County must assure that this preliminary planning is completed immediately, giving the Reston community both the opportunity to address early on the concept of how this area should develop, and then opportunity to review in detail preliminary plans developed by appropriate County agencies.

Questions that must be asked at the beginning of the planning process:

- **Does Fairfax County / Inova need all of their Town Center land holdings for future public facility needs?**
- **Should public facilities / uses within the County / Inova area remain separate and isolated from general Town Center commercial and residential use; that is, in a physically separate governmental campus, or should some of the uses and facilities be integrated into the overall fabric of the Town Center? For example, does the Reston Library need to have its own, free-standing, low-rise building, or could it be effectively integrated into high-rise development elsewhere within the Town Center? Can**

police and fire protection facilities cohabitate in the urban center? Can other non-governmental uses be included within the same building with governmental and public safety uses?

Addressing constrains upon future development –

Transportation Limitations - are of primary concern. It will simply not be possible for an unlimited number of single-occupant vehicles to attempt to access the Town Center and other Reston Core areas each day during peak travel periods. It is essential that other transportation modes be perfected and utilized here. **To accomplish this, a thorough comprehensive, multi-modal analysis of Reston’s present and future transportation system must be conducted as a prerequisite to permitting any significant additional development in Reston.**

- *Rail transit will help greatly.*
- *A shuttle-feeder bus system that will serve the Reston Core area very effectively must be developed as an alternative to the private auto especially during peak usage hours (not just weekday commuting hours). To compete effectively with the private auto, the bus system must –*
 - *Have a **dedicated right-of-way** in high traffic volume core areas. Otherwise the bus will bog down with the rest of bumper-to-bumper traffic. If the bus does not have preferential treatment, there will be no incentive for motorists to use shuttle buses. Under those conditions, bus transit will continue to be of marginal value as it is today. However, with a distinct time and money savings associated with using the shuttle bus, motorists will see the value of bus travel within the Core.*
 - *A set of reserved (dedicated) traffic lanes (both directions) must be set aside on Sunset Hills and Sunrise Valley Roads between the Monroe Street and Hunter Mill Road.*
 - *Likewise, such a set of dedicated lanes must be provided on Fairfax Parkway and Reston Parkway at least between Sunrise Valley Road and Baron Cameron Avenue. On Wiehle Avenue and Hunter Mill Roads, these lanes must be provided at least between Sunrise Valley Drive and Sunset Hills Road. On Monroe Street, dedicated lanes are needed between Fox Mill Road and Herndon Parkway.*
- **Parking Policies** - *For this concept to work, adequate free or significantly reduced-rate parking must be provided on the periphery of Reston. At the same time, free parking **must be eliminated** during peak hours within the Town Center and other Core area locations.*
 - *The South Reston Park-and-Ride lot provides an obvious opportunity to provide a multi-level parking structure to accommodate traffic from south of Reston. Again, with greatly reduced parking cost on the periphery of Reston relative to the peak-hours parking rates in the Core, the periphery parking/shuttle bus option should be obviously beneficial to the typical motorist. The commuter benefits with a distinct cost savings and a quicker, less stressful commuter trip to their Core-area destination.*
 - *In a similar manner, the Herndon - Monroe Street Park-and-Ride structure should be expanded to serve commuting autos coming to Reston from the west.*
 - *A **new** park-and-ride parking facility should be located off the Fairfax Parkway to the north of Reston, and **another** along Sunset Hills Road between Hunter Mill Road and Wiehle Avenue on the east.*

*While this proposal may seem drastic, it is both achievable and ultimately will prove to be **much** cheaper to implement than attempting to accommodate thousands of additional private autos in Reston Core areas. Town Center and other Core parking rates can be reduced, or be free, after peak usage hours (such as after 6 PM on week days) so as to attract after work usage by the general public. Without this approach, the future development potential of the Reston Town Center and other core areas must be greatly restricted.*

Building owners desperately seek prime tenants for their Town Center buildings. If the Town Center gets the reputation for being inaccessible due to on-going traffic congestion, prime tenants will go elsewhere.

The need to provide and maintain fewer very expensive parking spaces within the core will greatly benefit core area property owners, and will significantly off-set small additional tax costs they will incur contributing to a general Core area infrastructure fund.

- **Pedestrian – Bicycle System** -- *Central to an effectively functioning Reston Urban Core must be a concerted effort to build into the entire fabric of the Core area an exceptionally good pedestrian / bicycle walkway-pathway-public open-space system. If the walking and the bicycle trips to, from and within the Core are safe, comfortable, pleasant and even enjoyable, many hundreds of Restonians will take advantage of this commuting opportunity to the benefit of their health as well as the general transportation system. Special attention must be paid to –*
 - *Safe and well-lighted street/roadway crossings – grade-separated whereat all possible*
 - *Safe, patrolled, lighted, and reasonably sheltered and comfortable walk and access-ways*
 - *Points of interest or diversion along the way – shopping, landscaped areas, natural features*
 - *Facilities for bicycle storage, showers and dressing especially for bicyclists*
 - *The inter-connectability of access-ways among the various buildings within the Urban Core, and the adjacent Reston pathway – access-way system serving all of Reston.*
 - *It is absolutely essential that this entire access-way system be carefully designed to accommodate the special needs of citizens with mobility impairments.*

Public Facilities and Services:

It seems obvious that such public/private facilities as the Reston Regional Library, the North County governmental center/police facility, a new fire station, many health and social services facilities, an the potential of higher education facilities, a future auditorium/concert hall, art galleries, a teen recreation and community center, etc. can readily be integrated into the overall fabric of the Town Center or elsewhere in the Reston Core. These uses need not be located in free-standing, low-rise buildings on large lots with separate parking, but can be readily incorporated within multi-story buildings which have primary commercial or residential uses. Some forms of public-private development partnerships should be possible in order to enable these options.

Central to any discussion of both essential and desirable public facilities and amenities is (1) Where should they be located? How site specific is their location need? And (2) How will Reston be able to fund all the necessary and desirable facilities?

Can a Reston transportation center be integrated into this Urban Core mix?

Higher Education Facilities, Schools, Preschools, Daycare Centers

- *Can new (at least one is unquestionably needed) urban elementary school buildings be located in the Town Center but vary markedly from the conventional Fairfax County physical school building and site standards for a typical County elementary school while carefully maintaining the County's very high academic standards?*
- *Can an urban school in the Town Center be better integrated into the overall fabric of community activities for use as a general community facility beyond normal school hours? i.e. incorporating such uses as a community center? teen center? cultural center? an adjunct of the Reston library? allow for more convenient use as general community recreation and meeting facilities after school hours? accommodate an indoor swimming pool? incorporate special seniors-oriented capabilities?*

In addition to traditional public school requirements for new urban areas, the special daycare facilities needs for children of all ages must be taken into account.

- *Preschools and nursery care must be provided for.*

- *After school daycare for the full range of school-aged children covering the period until parents get off work*
- *Daycare facilities for special-needs adults of all ages must be provided.*

Why not? Surely with some compromise with respect to space allocation, cost and time scheduling this will be possible. Young school children have special safety and transport/access needs that must be carefully accommodated.

While large ball fields within the Reston Core areas may be out of the question, extensive indoor recreation/sports uses should be accommodated. Roof-top and outdoor plaza areas can also be established to allow children to vent their energy outdoors. A school is obviously well suited to be located next to a large urban park.

The obvious cost effectiveness of using a school building for many broader educational and community uses for a period of eighteen hours a day instead of the conventional eight hours of class and preparation sessions only should surely justify the additional complexity of overcoming shared funding and management responsibility and usage concerns.

Several centers of higher education are now located in Reston. These and other institutions would like to come to or expand within Reston. The Reston Core, especially near transit stations, is a logical location for higher education facilities that are especially devoted to continuing education and life-long education needs. Reston citizens and community organizations should work aggressively in the lead of helping these institutions locate and finance appropriate facilities in the Reston Core.

Life-long learning extends educational opportunities to citizens well beyond retirement age.

Park, Recreation Areas and Open-space

1. *What standards will the Park Authority use for assessing urban areas such as the Reston Core?*
 - *1.5 acres for each 1,000 residents could = 30 acres of very expensive Core space. Can this logically be done in Reston Core areas?*
 - *Parkland within 1,300 feet of each residence? Each employment center? How?*
2. *What will be the relationship among County Park Authority spaces, facilities and programs, other public and private facilities services and programs, and Reston Association community-sponsored spaces, facilities, services and programs?*

Define Public Open Space –

At least 25% of the total ground floor area of the Reston Core should be retained as common landscaped plazas, pedestrian ways, and natural areas. Such space does not include any space frequently used by motor vehicles. Public plazas and open-space can be permitted on levels other than the ground floor so long as they are readily and consistently available to the general public.

Rooftop areas should be used where possible for recreation and open space purposes.

Indoor recreation area will play an important role in meeting recreation needs.

Pocket parks and other small pedestrian-accessible areas will play important recreation and open space roles.

Playgrounds and recreation areas can be located in air-rights spaces over streets, parking decks, etc.

Major play fields must be located at more remote high school, intermediate and elementary campuses and parks on the periphery of the urban area.

Stream valley parks and other natural feature areas must be maintained within the Core to the extent feasible.

Eventually we will find that our existing Reston open space and recreation areas will be stretched beyond the reasonable limits of their capacity when they are also used by 20-30,000 new residents in addition to the current 60,000 residents and the employees of Reston. While it is still possible to do so, we must seriously consider how to acquire or more effectively utilize vacant open areas and existing public park lands on the periphery of Reston. There are still several very desirable vacant – undeveloped – private tracts adjacent to Reston that might be acquired. We have Lake Fairfax, Fox Mill Park, Stratton Woods Park, the Arboretum natural area at Herndon-Monroe, and Baron Cameron Park that must be worked into our long-term park, open space and recreation planning for Reston. A concerted, comprehensive, community-based evaluation of our future needs must begin NOW!)

Once again, how do we pay for these sites and new facilities?

- Can the County provide urban parkland, and indoor and outdoor recreation facilities, on part of its remaining vacant Town Center land?*
- Can the County develop an urban elementary school next to urban park and recreation facilities on County land?*

With good planning, why not? All these ideas would seem both reasonable and achievable ways to effectively utilize the very scarce availability of land and financial resources in this highly urban setting. With good planning and design, many effective green spaces can be provided to greatly temper the potential harshness of the surrounding urban setting. Storm water detention can be effectively accommodated. Creative landscaping and streetscape design can create a highly enjoyable though urban environment for residents and employees.

Libraries

The library of the 21st Century should be heavily interactive – the nerve center for the Reston information technology employment center. The Reston Regional Library must be expanded such that it is the central repository of all basic information, readily accessible via inter-active computer networks from home or office. The physical location of the library function need not be in a low-rise, free-standing building, but should be in close proximity to educational facilities located in the Reston Core.

Fire Station

The very urban Reston Core will have special high-rise public safety needs that cannot be served by near-by conventional suburban fire stations. A new Reston Core fire station will require a very specifically located site where its specialized equipment can have immediate and effective access to the entire service area. In the long run it may be possible for all Urban Core public safety facilities and operations to occupy the same location.

Police Station

Siting requirements should be more flexible than the fire station; however allows for co-location with other governmental facilities, possibly with fire and rescue services in a public safety center. Police officials must adapt to the new realities of urban land use by finding other ways of maintaining the integrity of their security needs without demanding a spread-out, free-standing security fortress.

Hospitals, Clinics, Out-patient and Social Service Needs

The Town Center is well provided with healthcare and social service facilities and programs today. It is not at all unreasonable, however, to consider that current requirements will double with rapidly increasing and aging populations from diverse backgrounds being added over time.

Environmental Concerns

Plan for consolidated, central storm water detention facilities – possibly underground beneath recreation space or public plazas.

Plan for extensive re-use of collected “grey water” as appropriate within the urban area.

Protect the integrity of Reston’s streams and lakes.

Strongly encourage the effective landscaping of building roof tops and exposed parking decks within the Urban Core

All building construction must meet a minimum of LEED Silver certification or its equivalent. Understanding that LEED and other certification standards will vary over time as new materials and processes develop, this requirement needs to be revisited frequently and up-dated as appropriate.

“Land sink’ – heat pump-like storing of summer heat and equipment-generated heat for future re-use; energy generation. Develop concepts for cooperative sharing of energy resources.