

March 7, 2011

Patricia Nicoson, Chair  
Reston Master Plan Special Study Task Force  
Department of Planning & Zoning  
Planning Division, Suite 730  
10255 Government Center Parkway  
Fairfax, VA 22035-5505

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RE: Balancing new jobs and housing units near Reston-area Metrorail station areas

Dear Ms. Nicoson:

Among the major challenges in your Task Force's planning for the three Reston-area Metrorail station areas is correcting the severe imbalances of jobs and housing units in those areas. However, the current preliminary planning reports by Task Force subcommittees seem to contemplate continued, serious imbalances into the foreseeable future.

According to a recent American Planning Association advisory, proper jobs/housing balance generally includes one appropriate housing unit for every 1.5 jobs in the community. (See generally Jerry Weitz, *Jobs-Housing Balance*, p. 4 (American Planning Association Advisory Service Report No. 516, 2003) ("*Weitz/APA*"), posted at: <http://www.planning.org/pas/reports/subscribers/pdf/PAS516.pdf>.) (That ratio is roughly comparable to a 1:1 ratio of jobs to workers living in the community.)

The current preliminary subcommittee reports all contemplate heavy concentrations of new jobs compared with new housing units. Overall, they project jobs/housing units ratios of roughly 4 to 1 or more into the foreseeable future. Of course, current jobs/housing units ratios along the Dulles rail corridor are even greater -- more than 10 to 1. Fairfax County has had the largest overall imbalance of jobs over housing units in the Washington area.

We urge the Reston Task Force to attach a much higher priority than is now being discussed to including ample residential development in their planning recommendations. Hopefully, the Steering Committee can assist the various subcommittees to coordinate their recommendations and achieve the needed balance.

Among the many reasons why it is crucial to achieve proper jobs/housing balance in planning for the Reston-area stations are that:

1. Since its inception, one of Reston’s explicit goals has been “that the people be able to live and work in the same community.”
2. Jobs/housing imbalances have produced, and increasingly will produce, great costs and burdens for people who live or work in Reston – and for their environment. Those costs and burdens include:
  - **increasingly congested highways and extreme commuting times**, due to the spatial disconnect between many of the job centers and the available housing;
  - **increased suburban sprawl**, which involves bulldozing and paving over more and more outlying countryside and degrading the environment;
  - **chronically soaring housing costs**, such as the 22 percent average jump in rents (inflation-adjusted) over the last decade in this region, recently reported by the *Washington Post*;
  - **housing market instability**, as soaring housing costs lead to real estate speculation, risky financing schemes, defaults, foreclosures, bankruptcies, and resulting financial crises, such as the severe recent crisis that still plagues us; and
  - **increased poverty and homelessness** -- lack of affordable housing has long been a leading cause of homelessness and poverty in this area and in many other major metropolitan areas of the United States; and
  - **lost economic development**, because people who want to live in Fairfax County, but cannot afford it, take their income and spend it elsewhere.
3. Sufficient, affordable housing is the law. In Virginia, comprehensive plans and portions thereof:

shall include . . . the designation of areas and implementation of measures for the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of *affordable housing*, which is *sufficient to meet the current and future needs of residents* of all levels of income in the locality *while considering the current and future needs of the planning district* within which the locality is situated.

Va. Code § 15.2-2223 (emphasis added). “Affordable housing” need not be synonymous with “subsidized housing.” Fundamentally, the lack of affordability of housing for most Fairfax County residents is related to inadequate supply compared to demand. The fundamental remedy for that is to plan for, and permit, housing to be built in sufficient amounts, types and densities, in the right places, without unnecessary costs and delays.

Of course, not all TOD stations need to have a 1:1 jobs:workers ratio, and defining the community which needs balance can be complex. Detailed guidance on how to proceed on those and other important aspects of jobs/housing balance is given in publications such as the *Weitz-APA* report.

The Task Force should request guidance and full information from Fairfax County planners on proper jobs/housing balance. That and other aspects of your work involve careful analysis of areas far beyond Reston, and planning expertise seems called for.

Please call on us for any help we can provide. Underlying data on which we base our comments is referenced in our letter to the Town of Herndon Planning Commission regarding the Herndon-Monroe North Metrorail area (copy attached), available online at: [http://www.herndon-va.gov/Content/Zoning/Comprehensive\\_Planning/Metrorail/publicinputJan14-Jan28.pdf](http://www.herndon-va.gov/Content/Zoning/Comprehensive_Planning/Metrorail/publicinputJan14-Jan28.pdf) (pp. 4-6).

Thank you very much for your attention to these comments. We wish you and the Task Force every success as you continue your very challenging, important work.

Sincerely,

Thomas A. Loftus, Esq.  
President and General Counsel

Attachment

cc: Heidi Merkel