

From: Joe Stowers [sydec@patriot.net]

Sent: Sunday, April 11, 2010 6:35 PM

To: Merkel, Heidi T.; Nicoson, Patty; Smith, Sandi M.

Cc: Chew, Richard; Thomas, Paul; Simon, Bob; Vanell, David; Hill, Art; de la Fe, Frank; Edwards, Dave

Subject: Possible need for a new a new zoning category?

Patty and Heidi,

I have another email (see below) that I would appreciate your distributing to the members of the RMPSS Task Force as a follow-up to some discussion that took place at the task force meeting on March 23.

Thanks very much!

Joe Stowers

Task Force members,

This is a follow-up observation regarding the brief dialog at the last meeting of the task force on March 23 between Art Hill and Frank de la Fe on the possible interest of the Task Force in considering the need for modifications and or additions to the County's zoning ordinance.

I'm moved to comment because at the same meeting I noticed in Heidi's handout incorporating comments and suggested editing of the 2020 planning principles that someone had made a comment on one of the composite planning principles (4. Density) that "the 13 people per acre residential density cap for the Reston PRC should be retained...." As most of you know, that limit is part of the Planned Residential Community (PRC) ordinance.

This is one of the more frequent comments that has been made over the last few years by people who are obviously concerned about the impacts of development on traffic congestion. I believe these people have a need to learn more about what causes our traffic congestion – i.e., one of the most important causes of this congestion is the fact that we have roughly twice as many jobs in Reston as we have Reston residents who are in the labor force. This imbalance is widely recognized around the U.S. and abroad as a major cause of congestion (see my editing of the composite planning principles under 1. Comprehensive Planning). The new Tysons Corner Plan now reflects the fact that the Tysons Corner area is much more imbalanced and it seeks to correct this by emphasizing the need to attract more residents into the area.

In summary the worst thing that can possibly be done to create even more severe congestion is to limit the population (and therefore the labor force) of Reston. If that 13 persons per acre limit were to be retained, property owners

in all of our planned high density areas already zoned PRC would soon basically have only one option open to them – i.e., respond to whatever market there is by building only commercial redevelopment at higher densities – and thus worsening the existing imbalance between Reston’s jobs and resident labor force – moving Reston in the direction of becoming more like Tysons – ironically while Tysons now realizes that it must go in the opposite direction.

The origin of the 13 persons per acre limit is not documented, but oral history indicates that it was added to Bob Simon’s draft PRC ordinance as an effort to prevent Reston from becoming denser in population than the average suburban subdivisions existing in the early 1960s. At the time few if any planners had any foresight into the enormous market that would materialize a decade or so later for campus-style office development, particularly in the Dulles corridor.

Despite obvious major changes and widespread understanding now of how balance in jobs and labor force affect congestion, pressures to retain the now totally illogical 13 persons per acre limit still persist. We should have long ago learned how difficult it often is to change anything when fear of change is so great that it exceeds fear of the status quo.

So, if the Task Force judges that it may not be politically feasible to eliminate the existing PRC limit of 13 persons per acre, we may have an opportunity to recommend an alternative that would hopefully be more acceptable because it would be of no threat to existing residential areas currently planned for low and medium density. And that is to facilitate, perhaps by direct County Board action, a large scale rezoning of all existing planned high density areas of Reston from PRC to a new zoning category that would retain all existing rights of PRC that pertain to those areas, but would exclude the existing limit of 13 persons per acre.

A related concern is one that I'm less sure of. The other existing Fairfax County planned zoning ordinances may not permit the the flexibility that PRC has in allowing a broad range of mixes of uses -- i.e., everything from pure residential to pure office to pure retail and almost any mix of all 3 uses. My understanding from Heidi is that there is a planned residential zoning category that is designed for mixed uses with residential being the primary use, and there is another planned commercial zoning category with commercial being the primary use. My question is: Is there a need for a new zoning category for planned mixed uses with the flexibility that PRC has without having either (a) the large acreage requirement of PRC, or (b) a serious overall density limit like PRC currently has? There may be a need for such a new zoning category in the rail station areas in order to permit greater flexibility in terms of mix of uses.

Joe Stowers