



Reston Citizens Association

September 30, 2013

Ms. Heidi Merkel, Senior Planner
Department of Planning & Zoning
Fairfax County

Dear Heidi,

In this letter, we provide our comments on V6.2 and V7.1 of the draft Reston Comprehensive Plan. For the sake of efficiency, when we refer to page numbers in this letter, we are referring to the pagination in V7.1. In several cases, we have provided alternative language to ease your effort to address our concerns.

Plazas (p.8)—We appreciate the inclusion (V6) and specificity (V7) on assuring that plazas are located throughout the TOD areas.

Connectivity (p. 8)—We appreciate that bicycles and pedestrian connectivity is an important element of the connectivity picture in the TOD areas, but we believe specifying it here over-emphasizes its importance, especially in light of the much greater carrying capacity and use demand for bus transit and personal vehicle connectivity. The words “pedestrian and bicycle” should be dropped and the words “for all forms of transportation mobility” should be added following “a high degree of connectivity.”

RA & RTCA (p. 8)—We appreciate the focus on these two entities as cornerstones for incorporating the future population and workforce as well as guiding future development.

Shifting land uses (p. 15)—V6 added a sentence saying that where infrastructure requirements interfere with development, “In those instances, new office uses may be considered for areas between ¼ and ½ mile of the stations.” The shifting of office uses outside the ¼-mile perimeter is another element of “flexibility” that will add to the congestion, environmental, and infrastructure needs problems. This is not flexibility we need. Drop this sentence.

Parks & recreational amenities (p. 25)—We appreciate the addition of this as a development objective although the full text is not visible. We believe, however, the last sentence in the paragraph merely repeats the shortcoming we have found in the district texts of postponing planning, acquisition, and development of parks and related facilities. We offer the following alternative to the current final sentence:

“Although the exact number of parks, their individual features and locations are not specifically determinable at this time, every effort should be made to meet at least to the minimum specifications for park land space and facilities/features as expected by the Preferred Development Scenario under the County’s Urban Parks Framework policy plan and the Park Authority’s Adopted Service Level Standard. This space and related facilities should be distributed pro rata within each specific transit station area.”

Once we see the first part of this paragraph, we may ask for further changes.

Consistent with the above, within each of the transit station area plans (Wiehle—page 102, Reston East—page 111, and Town Center—page 114), the vague language regarding planning, acquisition, and development of parks needs to be strengthened. In lieu of the last sentence in the pertinent paragraphs, the following should be substituted: *“Although the exact number of urban parks, their sizes and distribution cannot be specifically identified now, their development should be guided by the Urban Parks Framework and Park Authority Adopted Service Level Standard as applied to the Preferred Development Scenario for the transit station area as a minimum expectation.”*

Usage exemptions (pp. 28-30)—We object to the exemption (including *prorated* shares) of *any* category of development use, residential or non-residential. Although we have no objection to encouraging their development, we do not believe they should have a free pass to aggravate existing imbalances in the J:HH balance. The two paragraphs at the top of the page should be deleted. This objection extends to the language at the bottom of that page explicitly exempting hotels from consideration in the mix of uses as well as the FAR exemptions for certain specific institutional uses on p. 29 and educational uses on the bottom of p. 29-30. The key reason for this objection is the impact this “free” development will have on the J:HH balance for both the TSAs and the community as a whole, and specifically the adverse impact the addition of “free” non-residential development will have on traffic congestion. We believe this kind of “flexibility” only adds to the congestion, environmental, and other risks inherent in this draft plan text. For the record, we voted against the Task Force proposal to exempt hotels from FAR and mix considerations at the last RTF meeting. We object to any use being exempted from the Planned Development Scenario.

Bonus density (staff comment—p. 31)—Although we do not see plan text that support this change in staff’s new willingness to consider bonus density outside the ¼-mile boundary, we believe this “flexibility” will only compound the issues with density and balance. We believe staff should reconsider this position, even if its position is “only on a very selective basis.” We don’t need the camel’s nose under this tent; it will only create problems of discretion for the staff and adverse impacts on the community.

Improve connectivity (p. 35)—This paragraph should include an additional bullet point: “Assure mobility through the transit station areas for Restonians and others by improving the road network, especially at gateway intersections.” With more than 40% of the expected traffic in these areas comprising “through” traffic per FCDOT neither attracted or generated by station area development, it is important that people be able to drive to the Dulles Toll Road or the other side of Reston in a reasonably timely manner.

Pedestrian Realm (p. 36)—Staff may want to consider re-naming this section “Pedestrian and Bicycle Realm” or writing a separate section on bicycle-related recommendations.

Streetscape Zones (p. 38)—The added sentence beginning “Along selected existing streets...” is confusing. If these streets are integral to the TOD grid of streets, they should meet the same standards as new streets in our view, creating an integrated vision for the immediate area. We believe this sentence should be dropped. Dropping this sentence may have implications for the later discussion of specific streetscapes.

Surface parking (p. 59)—We continue to be concerned about the construction of new surface parking lots, even in non-TOD areas. This land area could be much better used as park and recreation area. We recommend that language in this section discourage any surface parking and call for parking to be integrated into use structures (residential or commercial) or, less desirable, in parking garages.

Building heights (p. 61)—Notwithstanding the County’s bad decision to allow a 23-story office building to replace the TCOB more than ½ mile from the Town Center Metro station, we fail to understand why the language here has been weakened from taller buildings “will” be nearer the stations to “should generally” be nearer the stations. This additional “flexibility” again opens the door to added density and architecturally inappropriate structures (like the TCOB building replacement). We believe the language here should be “will”. Otherwise, we think the language changes in that paragraph are an improvement.

Calculation of Publically Accessible Open Space (p. 62)—We believe the percentage of net lot area allocated to open space should be 25 percent vice 20 percent. Given the substantial space required for streets and sidewalks, allocating only 20 percent of the remaining space would create a substantial shortfall in space available for public uses. Moreover, the added open space would give developers an opportunity to make their spaces more attractive to employees, residents, and visitors.

Monitoring system (p. 64)—We thank you for returning the monitoring effort to the totality of development, not merely new development.

Bicycles (p. 65+)—We appreciate the addition of this section and look forward to reviewing the pedestrian section in the next draft version.

Public Transportation (p. 69)—This section is grossly inadequate, especially in its superficial treatment of the local public transit system. Please see our further commentary and proposed language on public transportation appended to this letter.

Network Level of Service (p. 70)—We lack confidence that a NLOS calculation will have any meaningful impact on controlling traffic congestion in the station areas given the diverse nature of those streets, especially at the gateway intersections. At a minimum, we believe the following phrase needs to be added to the first sentence: “..., including achieving and sustaining an LOS “E” at each of the station area gateway intersections.”

Vehicle trip reduction goals (p. 71): Table 1: Transportation Demand Management (TDM), Vehicle Trip Reduction Goals For Commercial and Residential Development needs to specify—a footnote would be fine—what the reduction goals are from. Otherwise, only people steeped in transportation planning jargon will know what this means. We believe the goals, per se, are commendable.

Key roadway network improvements (p. 72)—Thank you for providing this prioritized list. We

would recommend that (except for the grid of streets item) it be ordered consistent with FCDOT's TIA brief in April. We are specifically referring to viewgraph p. 36, "Prioritization of Major Improvements," which ranks the projects importance on their "daily vehicle hours of congestion." (The Soapstone Connector and Town Center Parkway crossings rank at the top.)

Bicycle lanes on collector and local streets (p. 75+)—We believe that collector and local streets, like other streets, should have a separate on-street bicycle lane. If we want to encourage bicycle use, these safety steps need to be taken—being hit by a car at slow speed is not much of a consolation for bicyclists. Moreover, the absence of lanes may lead bicyclists to ride on sidewalks, putting pedestrian safety at risk. Add bicycle lanes to these streets.

Parking Maximums (p. 76)—Whether or not there is a table (and we prefer one because it is explicit), we strongly believe that parking maximums that discourage driving will be essential to reducing vehicle trips in the TSAs. We will reserve judgment on this issue until reviewing new plan text to be presented in V8.

Funding of Transportation Improvements... (p. 78)—As we have said before, this single paragraph is grossly inadequate for addressing this critical infrastructure development need. At the minimum, it needs to add a sentence that states the following: "The preferred funding approach must assure that the preponderance of funding is provided by those entities that will profit most financially from the transportation improvements."

Urban parks... (p. 85): The following sentence must be dropped: "To supplement these parks and facilities, elements of the larger Reston area's robust park and recreation system (outside of the TSAs) may be able to be improved to help meet the needs of future residents and employees." There should be no expectation that the people who are members of RA should be forced to accommodate the needs of the tens of thousands of new residents and employees in the TSAs. In fact, the County's Urban Parks Framework highlights that parks & recreation facilities should be within easy walking distance (1/2 mile), not extended through out a broader community or region.

Core P&R needs (p. 88)-- A column needs to be added to Table 2: Core Needs for Reston Transit-Station Areas Urban Park System (page 88) that specifies the quantity of each type of facility consistent with the Preferred Development Scenario (e.g.—25 athletic fields, etc.).

"Creativity" in P&R (p. 90)—Drop the phrase, "redevelopment at nearby parks." As stated above, both the vision for Reston and County policy call for parks and recreation to be where they "live, work, and play," not somewhere "nearby"—which is undefined.

Schools (p. 94)—We fail to understand why the location for the second elementary school has been shifted from the Wiehle station area to the "Central Sunrise Valley District." Aside from the fact that a much larger residential population is anticipated for the north Wiehle area, the newly proposed school location is less than ¼-mile from a recently re-built Dogwood Elementary School, which could easily be expanded to accommodate residential population growth in the south Town Center area. On the other hand, the closest elementary schools to the north Wiehle area are more than a mile away (Forest Edge,

Lake Anne) and they will also be dealing with population growth at Lake Anne due to its planned redevelopment. The second elementary school should be located in the north Wiehle area, preferably in the Isaac Newton Square area.

“Additional flexibility...” (p. 99)—The addition of a sentence that “additional flexibility” may come when a “true mix of uses” is established is gratuitous and suggests little intent to achieve the Preferred Development Scenario upon which this draft plan is supposedly based. It needs to be dropped.

Pedestrian & bicycle crossings (p. 105+)—We appreciate this attention to the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists, especially the inclusion of grade-separate crossings as an option.

Residential development southeast of Sunset Hills/Michael Farraday (p. 111): The addition of a sentence authorizing residential development of 30 DUs per acre is worrisome. We do not recall that this proposal has been presented in any previous draft plan nor by the Wiehle Sub-committee. We are not sure whether it is already zoned for this type/density of development. If this area is not currently zoned for this type/density of development, this sentence should be dropped. Otherwise it would, once again, defeat the J:HH balance called for in the Preferred Development Scenario.

Respectfully submitted,

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RCA Representative to the Reston Task Force

CC:

Patty Nicoson, Chairman, Reston Task Force
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PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IN THE DRAFT MASTER PLAN TEXT (p 69, v7)

The discussion of public transportation in the new Reston in the Master Plan (Version 7, p. 69) is woefully inadequate.

Rather than laying out some guidelines about what will be needed, it makes reference to the current Transportation Development Plan. This plan, done in 2009, does not deal with the proposed expansion of the Reston TOD areas. It talks about issues needed for Reston commuters to reach the Wiehle station and proposes some additional access issues when the Reston Town Center and Herndon stations open.

However, the transportation problems of the new Reston are going to be significantly different. The Master Plan proposes something like 40,000 new residents and 60,000 new employees in the three TOD areas. This is going to dramatically transform the Reston transit needs from links for commuters to get to the stations to the need for a new transit system to link the Village Centers to the new TOD areas, to provide effective connections between the TOD areas, and above all, to funnel workers who will not be using Metro from the Reston and outlying communities to the TOD employment areas. The latter will be essential since limited parking is envisioned in the TOD areas and the plan hopes to limit roadway congestion.

Reston Association put this need succinctly in its 16 August statement to DPZ. The plan “needs to discuss whatever is needed to provide a reliable urban bus network for all of Reston—not just feeder service to Metro.” “Expanded service should be mentioned, not just the modification of routes to the stations.”

The Master Plan draft already points in the direction of better public transportation. The section on Transportation Demand Management discusses measures that will need to be taken when auto traffic exceeds demands. These include

- “increasing transit use through the provision of additional and improved services”
- Optimizing TDM “with measures that might include greater transit use.”

Last week’s Task Force discussion of parking limitations also point in this direction. There clearly will be serious limitations on parking in the new TOD areas. Some are already talking about tolled parking at Town Center. As one member said “we don’t just want to attract more auto commuters.” In this environment, robust public transportation will be essential.

Some of the issues involved in this do not directly affect the current Mater Plan. These include:

- more frequent scheduling of buses
- expanded bus service to cross county areas
- Increased service from the perimeter of Reston.

But other possible steps directly impact the plan:

- Conversion of at least one new lane on new roadways to public and car pool travel, especially during rush hours (including on the new Dulles crossings). (RMAG already called for this in the case of the Soapstone crossing)
- Establishment of off the road bus stops to reduce traffic impedance (let us not have more Wiehles).
- A better linkage in Town Center so buses can directly access the two major stops, Town Center Station and the Town Center bus depot on Bluemont. (Currently thinking seems to be to route these buses on a circuitous route about town.)

We proposed the following language for this section:

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

(ADD) The development of a new Reston with its dense population concentrations around the TOD areas—up to 40,000 new residents and 60,000 additional employees-- will make reliance on an expanded public transportation network essential.

Metro rail: Keep first two sentences. Add **Encouragement of Metro rail ridership should be a key element in Transportation Demand Management programs.**

Local bus Service: Keep first sentence. Modify second sentence as follows: These routes will be modified to provide convenient and reliable feeder service **when the new Metro rail stations open at Reston Town Center and Herndon.** Add: **The development of new residential and office communities in the TOD areas will require a modification of bus service to provide more expanded, reliable, convenient and frequent urban bus service from other parts of Reston as well as outlying communities to the new TOD areas. There will also be a need for effective connector service between the TOD areas and between the South and North Town Center areas. This should be a primary objective of updates to the County Transportation Development Plan.**