PRELIMINARY COMMENT ON "DRAFT" RESTON WEST-HERNDON SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT

Prepared for the Herndon-Monroe Sub-committee of the Reston Master Plan Special Study Task Force

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Dick Rogers

(These comments are based on the sub-committees 27 Sept 2010 report which apparently is a draft, incomplete report. It has key judgments and some details but lacks a complete narrative.)

KEY POINTS

The report has many positive aspects:

- *Protection of the wetlands and Polo Fields, arguing against expansion of the garage.*

But it needs to:

- *Clarify its vision for TOD, particularly in the immediate station area.*
- *Define more clearly its proposal for an east-west station access road.*
- *Clarify its vision for retail, open space and pedestrian-bike connectivity.*
- *Emphasize the urgency of Herndon establishing access to the station from the North side.*

Many Good Points

The report contains a number of solid, important points that will win widespread endorsement in the Reston community. These include judgments that:

- Protect the Polo Fields residential community.
- Preserve the "wetlands" in the TOD area and advocate their being permanently protected under the ownership or control of a public entity, presumably RA.
- urges conversion of Sunrise Valley Drive in the area as a "grand, green boulevard" (see note below).

But Also Uncertainties

Because the report is a preliminary draft and much narrative has not been completed, it does pose some stylistic and presentational issues that begin to impact on substance.

It does not contain an overall vision for the area, particularly the ½ mile circumference around the station. It is not clear if the report envisions this as primarily commercial or residential or mixed use. Overall the report has a tone highly protective of commercial development; this further clouds the overall view of the sub-committee.

The report would benefit from a brief "summary" that would incorporate this 'vision" and highlight other key conclusions.

Some important judgments appear only in the specific land bay recommendations. It would be helpful if these could be brought to the summary or key themes section. Some important points that should be highlighted include protection of the wetlands and the development of an East-West access road to the station.

Because a narrative is now absent, the reasoning and argumentation behind some of the judgments are not always apparent. It is not clear, what, if any, alternatives were considered.

Presumably many of these points will be addressed in the final draft.

SOME SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Expand the Garage? The draft report and most 2020 observers agree that the current number of parking spaces is sufficient and that a doubling of parking capacity is not recommended (although this point is not highlighted and only appears in the discussion of land unit C-2). The draft appears to recommend that the existing garage become part of a public-private transit oriented development in the C-2 station site.

Most 2020 participants would recommend even stronger language to make this point. If the garage is doubled it essentially means that this key land unit would become a way station for commuters. It would not be an attractive site for a mixed use, predominantly residential community. TOD development would be precluded.

However, one significant dissenter is Dave Edwards, chair of the RA transportation committee and a key contributor to the 2020 transportation paper. Mr. Edwards argues that the garage be expanded and become part of a series of garages on the periphery of Reston Center that will feed the town center via bus connections. Although the broader point deserves consideration by the entire Task Force, we think that the Reston West-Herndon location, because it is adjacent to a station, is too valuable for this purpose.

East–West Access to Station: The draft report seems somewhat hesitant in arguing for a convenient east-west

connection to the station from Monroe and Fairfax County Parkway. Although the general points say that access to the station from these right-of-ways is “fundamental to. ..redevelopment” the text does not follow this up clearly.

It seems to suggest that access from the West come through land unit C-1 and that access from the east come through the middle of the existing Sprint property in C-4. It is not clear from the text if a through road is envisioned of just one way connections to the garage.

We think it important to have a two-way through street through the entire area. This will become an important access route to the station enabling traffic to by-pass Sunrise Valley and will also serve as the “main street” for any transportation oriented development.

In our view, this would be best located as close to the Dulles Road as possible. We note that the tentative map of the Vision Sub-committee projects such a route through county owned C-2 property. This route avoids encroachment on the “wetlands” and ties into the existing road net in A-1/A-2. We think at the east end, it would be better to locate such a street at the North end of the Sprint property to tie in with the existing Dulles toll road exit ramp. It is important that this entrance to the station on the east end accommodate north and south bound traffic on Fairfax County Parkway.

If the county goes ahead with its tentative plan to expand the garage, East-West access to the garages will be even more important to reduce the traffic impact on Sunrise Valley Drive and its already congested intersections.

Density and Mix: The report does not offer speculative FARs nor is it completely clear about the office-residential mix envisioned. (However, in some sections, such as the discussion of western most A-1—which is over ½ mile from the station—the draft sensibly states that office use should remain the primary function.) We believe that moderate density, much less than in Reston Center, is called for and that this should have a clear bias toward residential.

Although the report does not make clear the balance of residential vs. commercial envisioned, it does make some broad points with which we are in agreement:

- highest density should be adjacent to the station in A-1, C1/2/3/4.
- Highest density should be along the Toll Road with less intensive development along Sunrise Valley.

We think the report should call for a 60-40 residential-commercial mix in the immediate TOD area. A high proportion of residential provides the best opportunity to maximize Metro

rider ship, encourage pedestrian oriented development and reduce automobile congestion. Such development would still allow for substantial high-rise commercial development at the Northeast part of C-4 at the Toll road and Fairfax County Parkway.

Retail and Woodland Park: One area that gets no distinct mention in the report is the existing Woodland Park development in easternmost A-1 (about ½ mile from the station). This development, perhaps a prototype for redevelopment for some Reston Village Centers, features a combination of retail, underground parking and residential units. Retail ranges from local businesses to a Harris Teeter. It is adjacent to additional relatively dense residential units to the west (also in eastern A-1) and adjacent to A-2, which is a prime site for mixed use transit oriented development. It is not clear if the sub-committee envisions the Woodland park center to remain as the primary Reston West "village center" or envisions other retail development in the area.

We think the bulk of retail should be west of Monroe Street in this area. If Woodland Park is to remain as the primary retail site, it would be appropriate to add to it a suitable indoor-outdoor community meeting place, possibly as part of development in adjacent A-2.

We think that within the station area (C-1/2/3/4) retail should be limited to immediate support needs.

Herndon: The report briefly notes that actions taken by Herndon with regard to station access and re-development are important to the future of the Reston side. Unfortunately, the draft does not develop why this is so. Indeed, the 8 November presentation by Herndon consultants on their initial ideas regarding Herndon development makes additional sub-committee commentary on this issue imperative. The consultants made no real effort to address the issue of station access from the Herndon side.

Without appropriate development on the Herndon side, all Metro bound passengers will need to cross the Toll Road, further burdening the Monroe and Fairfax County Parkway crossings. Herndon needs to at least provide pedestrian access to the station, "kiss and ride" access for auto passengers and convenient access by bus passengers to the station.

In view of Fairfax county projections of 15 failing intersection n the Reston area by 2030, it is essential that planning do what it can to alleviate future congestion.

Of course, possible mixed use transit oriented development near the station on the Herndon side, which is predominantly office now, will also be relevant.

It would be worth developing some of these points as well as calling the county's attention to the urgency of this issue. The sub-committee should also consider what review of its plans will be necessary when Herndon gets its act together.

One proposal, which is not discussed in the draft, is a suggestion by Joe Stowers. In his Vision Committee transportation report, he proposes that the existing exit ramp from the parking garage to westbound DTR be converted to provide two way traffic and pedestrian access from Herndon to the south side station area. This would take pressure off Monroe and Fairfax County Parkway. We think this possibility deserves consideration.

Open space: Important issues relating to open space and recreation are not considered in the draft.

Other than the important "wetlands issue," it is not clear how the sub-committee envisions the area developing in terms of open space and recreational facilities. We note that the Vision Sub-committee has announced a goal of 20% open space and that, if a substantial mixed-use TOD residential community evolves, additional recreation facilities will be needed. Some have suggested that portions of C-3 could be used for this purpose.

The area in C-3, currently underutilized because of environmental issues that make development difficult (storm water retention, flood plains etc). This area could be very desirable for additional open space or recreational areas.

Pedestrian-Bike Connectivity: This receives passing attention in the current draft. There needs to be a set of connections developed to the existing RA trail system. We support the concept of a continuous bike-ped trail along the Dulles Road from Wiehle westward into A-1. This would provide another access route to the station.

Pedestrian crossings need to be improved throughout. Of particular importance are protected crossings of Sunrise Valley from Polo Fields to the station area and crossings of Monroe Street both to the station and to Woodlands Park. A grade separated crossing of Fairfax County Parkway seems essential and at least one grade-separated crossing should be considered for Monroe Street.

Note: "Grand Green Boulevard": As noted earlier, the sub-committee has called for the conversion of Sunrise Valley into a "grand green Boulevard." The Wiehle sub-committee has also suggested this concept along the southern side of the corridor. We support this creative idea and urge its continuation through the Town Center south area