

**Discussion Draft submitted by Robert Goudie, 12/19/10:**

**Can and should we implement a 2:1 SF res:office minimum at Wiehle?**

1. Defining Wiehle's vision is admittedly challenging (more so than Town Center) and is impacted by how we define the TC downtown. The stations must complement one another to achieve multiple community objectives.
2. The Committee and its Chairs wrestled hard with these issues and should be commended. They agree the station area "should evolve to include more residential than office." (p. 1 of the Committee Report)
3. The issue is could/should the residential component be stronger than the Committee's 55:45 recommendation within the ½ mile radius (like the Committee this discussion draft excludes G-7 and I-3 since both are essentially outside the ½ mile radius).

**Why 2:1?**

1. *If 1:1 is appropriate for the downtown then it (or something close to it, like 55:45) is intuitively inappropriate for areas that are not the downtown.* Creating a regional downtown/destination has powerful benefits for our community, but it also has consequences. One of them is we need to be more aggressive about picking up strong TOD residential at the other stations.
2. *There is precedent in the R-B corridor for this kind of approach* generally (where other stations complement the downtown) and for 2:1 outside the downtown in particular. *Courthouse, Clarendon, and maybe most importantly VA Square/GMU (which has the educational component that the Wiehle Committee sees as part of Wiehle's vision) are today on the ground each at +/- 2:1 SF res:office.* Moreover, Arlington County's Round 8.0 forecast (attached) projects that through 2040 more res than office will continue in demand at these stations. I think these stations complement the Ballston downtown (1:1) and help make it work by providing robust residential populations along the linear rail line. This is important. Typical urban and more commercial downtowns are connected to encircling residential neighborhoods by a spider rail network – a hub and spoke model. Our downtowns (Ballston, Tyson's, Town Center) are being created along a linear rail line (not hub and spoke with rail), so it is important that there be predominantly residential station areas along the line that complement and feed these downtowns. I think Arlington recognized this, which is in part why you have predominantly residential stations between Rosslyn and Ballston (creating what I'm told is called the "barbell effect"). We've learned that the mix of uses is the single biggest impact we can have on the DOT model and our goal of mitigating congestion impacts of new growth. At 55:45 there is a 10 point spread between res and office at Wiehle. At 67:33 (2:1) it is *30 points, or 3x greater than the Committee recommendation.* I think that will have a material and positive impact on the DOT model and congestion on the ground.

3. *2:1 also serves the important community goal of balancing our housing stock by offering an even stronger TOD housing option at Wiehle that will be significantly less expensive than TC.*

### **Restating the Wiehle Vision**

The Committee vision states that Wiehle will be “a well-balanced, urban, mixed-use area with residents, offices, hotels, restaurants, shops, outdoor activities, educational institutions, cultural and other attractions.” (p. 1) Save the educational piece, this is very similar to the downtown vision. The differentiator is that Wiehle will be less intense.

My instinct is these stations should be of different character. Creating a dynamic downtown/destination animates the TC vision. Creating robust TOD residential should animate Wiehle. This will help us achieve multiple and complementary community goals. A possible restatement of the Wiehle vision:

*Wiehle will be a mixed use but predominantly residential TOD space, urban in form with special encouragement for supporting retail and educational-related development.*

### **Implementing that Vision**

There are multiple ways to achieve that vision. For discussion purposes, here’s one way:

1. *2:1 res:non-res, only retail and educational exempted from the ratio.*
  - a. All non-res consumes scarce land that could be devoted to the res priority, so exceptions should be limited.
  - b. Retail, which can be a challenge to get built, is needed to make this an interesting and sustainable place to live. Exempting it provides incentive.
  - c. Educational is a Committee goal. I’d want to hear more discussion on this. If there is consensus this is a community goal then it may be worth exempting.
2. *Capping office within the ½ mile radius at 8MSF.<sup>1</sup>*
  - a. I’m reluctant to cap. It will create a race to the courthouse to gobble up office slots. But creating a DOT model sans cap may be difficult and a cap may be needed in a 2:1 paradigm (less you get unrealistic res levels).
  - b. I used GMU2050 as a benchmark, which projects 19MSF non-res *for the entire Wiehle study area*. G-7 and I-3 comprise 50% of the study’s land area (262 of 522 acres) and existing non-res SF (4.1 of the total 8.2MSF). Consequently, I ascribed 50% of the GMU2050 projection, or 9.5MSF, to G-7 and I-3 and 50% to the remaining land units that are all within the ½ mile radius. Exempting retail and educational from the ratio, an 8MSF non-res cap within the ½ mile radius would seem to be rationally related to the GMU2050

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<sup>1</sup> N.B.: My apologies if I misapply the numbers. I’m not a numbers guy and I’m trying to get this done for Monday’s Steering Committee meeting. I’ve done my best with the data provided. If any of it is wrong, let’s fix it and get the assumptions/data right and then retest the thesis.

projection. For perspective: 8MSF=200% growth over existing conditions. The Committee allows 10.6MSF of non-res outside of G-7 and I-3.

- c. In essence, under a 2:1 paradigm with a non-res cap of 8MSF one would be taking 2.6MSF of non-res from the Committee recommendation and putting that in res. The net effect would be to +/- triple the delta between res and non-res over the Committee recommendation, which unquestionably would alter the DOT model and create less traffic impacts.
  - d. Moreover, an 8MSF non-res cap at 2:1 yields about 24MSF of total development (*excluding retail and educational*), which is comparable to the Committee's overall total (which specified no exemptions). So all of this could be accomplished at FAR levels approximating the Committee's recommendation. Candidly, I'm open to higher FAR levels if that would drive more residential. Indeed, whatever non-res FAR is set at 2:1, I think a developer should be allowed to go above that FAR so long as the increase would be attributable solely to residential (much like the Town Center model).
  - e. I acknowledge this would require 16MSF of res if fully built out to the cap, and GMU2050 only projects 12MSF for this entire area. That is a concern, but since much of this res would presumably be "banked" it should not hold up progress. In addition the TC Committee was told GMU significantly underestimated res along the R-B corridor in the past. I think as we make this an even more exciting area res demand eventually will be there.<sup>2</sup>
3. ***Allowing non-res to be concentrated nearer the station.***
- a. The Committee took this approach and assigned ratios parcel by parcel.
  - b. I'm OK with that but inclined toward a TC model – every parcel subject to 2:1 but developers can jointly zone and trade slots so long as any zoning application overall gets to 2:1. This gives developers some flexibility to respond to where the market wants uses. (How Comstock fits into this, already approved at 60:40 office:res I think, I haven't addressed.)
  - c. However it's done, more office nearer the station means more res elsewhere to compensate. At 2:1 overall, a place like Isaac Newton Square would have to be almost 100% residential (the Committee recommendation is 70:30).
4. ***This also may require rethinking the open space paradigm for Wiehle.***
- a. If residential is the priority, there is only so much land to realize the objective.
  - b. Allowing up to 25% open space in this urban area is I think inappropriate. The TC proposal probably makes sense: start from 20% and relax that if you can create shared open spaces (like central greens).

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<sup>2</sup> Query whether a 6MSF cap – 150% growth over existing conditions – would be adequate. That would yield 12MSF res at 2:1, exactly the GMU2050 projection for Wiehle. My guess is Staff and the DOT model would even better like that. Whether it would adequately incent redevelopment is unclear.

## **Addressing Some Criticisms of 2:1 Already Expressed**

1. ***You are trying to create Vienna at Wiehle.***
  - a. No. We are still talking urban form with 8MSF of non-res *in addition to* retail and educational. That is not Vienna.
  - b. VA Sq/GMU – 2:1 with an educational component – is a more apt analog.
2. ***No one will want to live here.***
  - a. VA Sq, Clarendon, and Courthouse put the lie to that concern.
  - b. To the contrary, 2:1 creates an interesting alternative:
    - i. First, you'd create even more TOD housing stock that would be significantly less expensive than TC. That is good.
    - ii. Second, you'd create a more residential feel. I think that is good. Not everyone wants to live downtown.
    - iii. Third, you will better mitigate traffic impacts in this area and that will also help create a more desirable dynamic.
3. ***You are just going to create more cars driving to Town Center to eat, shop, etc.***
  - a. First, it is only peak (job-related) traffic that is of concern. We know from experience (reflected in the DOT model) that more residential will help.
  - b. Second, demographic data show that folks in Clarendon, Courthouse, and VA Sq are willing to take the Metro one or two stops rather than fight paid parking (which will come to TC), traffic, be more green, whatever. Wiehle will likewise adapt when traveling to TC or Tyson's.
4. ***You will delay redevelopment at Wiehle and this is a "lost opportunity."***
  - a. First, it is unclear redevelopment will get delayed. GMU projects that res demand will outstrip office demand at Wiehle by 3:1 through 2050.
  - b. But, if there is some delay at least we will eventually get what we want. Allow office to fill in at less than 2:1 now and you will not recover that land for res in our kids' lifetimes. Conversely, if the future market wants Wiehle to morph into more of a mini-downtown it is always easier to tear down residential, so that possibility is preserved. The time to draw the line is now.
5. ***This will create insufficient incentive to tear down existing commercial.***
  - a. For me this is the real issue. I don't know the answer to this. I'm open to hearing from developers and experts and see what we can make work.
  - b. But note that an 8MSF non-res cap appears generally consistent with GMU2050 for the ½ mile and *would allow for 200% non-res growth over existing conditions* (a 6MSF cap would allow 150% growth). My instinct is 2:1 will be hard but achievable.
  - c. This is where the dialogue needs to focus if/once we get consensus that the kinds of benefits and goals outlined in this document make sense. From there we have enough smart people to make it happen.