Reston Master Plan Special Study

Steering Committee Meeting Notes

March 29, 2011

Announcements. Patty Nicoson opened the meeting with a few announcements. The Fairfax County Board Of Supervisors approved station names for the eight stations within Fairfax County. They are: Tysons McLean, Tysons I & II, Tysons Central, Tysons West-Springhill Road, Reston East-Wiehle, Reston Town Center, Herndon-Reston West, and Route 28. The only discussion was whether the Herndon – Monroe should be renamed Herndon, Reston West-Herndon or Herndon-Reston West. The compromise was Herndon-Reston West. Patty had been interviewed by Julie Cary of NBC 4News about the station names. A short clip played on the TV evening news.

The Reston Association sent a letter dated March 11, 2011, expressing support for the principles of the Polo Fields Home Owners Association concerning traffic, parking and access issues at the Herndon-Monroe Park & Ride and related transit-oriented development at the site.

The Chris Walker case in federal court was dismissed on March 21 ending all the legal challenges to the Dulles Corridor Metro Rail Project. A number of news articles addressing transit-oriented development and long-range planning were published and will be included in the Friday e-mail to the study listserv.

Public Comment. Doug Pew raised a concern about development on Isaac Newton Square: how can we get a mix of housing types and how can we limit retail? Judith Pew said Doug was concerned about the article stating that Wal-Mart would be coming to the transit station at Tysons West. They did not think this was an appropriate use next to Metro rail station. Heidi Merkel responded that the issue is how to appropriately scale retail, how to define retail. She noted that the zoning in Tysons was commercial and that the zoning in Isaac Newton Square was industrial. The County would have some control over the nature and size of retail there. She noted that Target and Wal-Mart are designing more urban type stores. Bill Penniman said that the Wiehle Avenue Committee had recommended a mix of 75% residential and 25% commercial on Isaac Newton Square. They thought it would be too hard to require a specific percentage of retail.

Heidi Merkel said that staff had prepared a map indicating 2 and 3-mile radii around the interchange of Reston Parkway with the Dulles Toll Road. She was concerned about using the jobs/household balance as a target. At the transit station areas, not all objectives are equal. For some objectives you want to realize the benefits sooner. Staff presented a strawman of TOD Area planning objectives in a table format with Planning Approaches to Achieve Objectives as the second column.

Heidi Merkel noted that radii around the Wiehle Avenue station was not correct because staff still did not have an accurate map of the station location. They are working to get one. Where do you measure the radii? At the touchdown point? She noted that the curve of the radii would not be boundaries for the planning recommendations.

In a strawman that had been prepared, Heidi noted that 50% absorption in the 20-year plan time frame was the basis of staff assumptions. These were reflected in the tables showing square footage of uses and jobs housing balance. The plan does not assume a 100% buildout. Commercial includes industrial uses: storage facilities, warehouses, flex space, and research facilities. Their assumptions were based on the age and condition of buildings. In the map they had prepared, the dark blue areas indicate 100% absorption and light blue areas 50%.

The table on jobs/housing balance indicates that the current balance for all of Reston is 3.0 (2.98). Heidi said we should not take the ratio as a determining factor.

Mark Looney suggested the need for an "x factor". If we knew how much development was expected at buildout, then the group could parcel out development for the plan. We could do a qualitative analysis.

Heidi said the total was 18 million ft.^{2}, an increase in from 13 million ft.^{2}. Is that reasonable? Mark Looney wanted to put this in the context of the big picture. If it is the county's policy to channel development to transit-oriented development areas, Fairfax County is expected to get 150,000 jobs over the next 20 years and 45 million ft.^{2} of office space. Where is the county planning for that to go? Based on county policy, it should go to transit corridors. That would be in the Dulles corridor and Tysons Corner but only 30% of that is channeled there. We need to do periodic benchmarking. Greg Riegle supported looking longer-term to get a truer planning horizon.

Fred Selden said that when they looked at Tysons Corner and the Dulles corridor, there is more than enough development. We are not talking about Route 28 where there are large, secure campus facilities. While there are eight new stations, there are other activity centers in Fairfax County. The dilemma is how to try to shape the future. We could look back at plans that the Board of Supervisors approved for West Falls Church and Vienna. Office development never really materialized there. How do we do better? As to the job/housing balance, the last time we tried to head the county in a different direction, we tried to balance the flow of traffic. The key now is going to be how to balance objectives.

Robert Goudie asked don't you have to quantify jobs/housing balance. Fred responded if there is only one housing type in the corridor (high rise apartment buildings) we might not be able to absorb that fast enough. There would be a problem with just a single use housing type.

Robert Goudie suggested that the jobs/housing balance was key and that we start by determining what that should be and at what scale: Reston-wide, transit station areas, village centers? Heidi responded that setting a goal for the jobs/housing balance for a transit station area would be premature. We need to ensure that the mix reflects the objectives for the station.

Bill Penniman noted that they the Wiehle group sought to incentivize housing by providing for increased FAR from 2.5 to 3.0 if the FAR was residential. Heidi suggested revising Appendix D. and setting relative priorities. Mark Looney mentioned the sites of several property owners to illustrate the difficulty of trying to have one-size-fits-all.

Heidi Merkel was concerned that we not favor lower, older office buildings where the increment is easier to achieve. Development might end up in areas that were not the highest priority and not at the station areas.

Bill Penniman said that at Wiehle Avenue the Wiehle Committee proposed by 2050, 10 million ft.^{2} of office space and 14 million ft.^{2} of residential.

Mark Looney noted that we needed ways to affect the decisions of property owners, citing Kaiser Permanente and the need to acquire some of its land for the Soapstone Drive extension. He was concerned about the signals that we will be sending to property owners.

Greg Riegle was concerned about the process, of how we are going to get where we need to be. We need to take what we have and have the Steering Committee roll up its sleeves and make decisions. We need to shift the burden from the staff.

One issue will be the different levels of development: infill versus redevelopment. What do we want to see?

Mark Looney referred to the Tysons plan example, which has no restrictions on the amount a residential and basically says that the county wants as much residential as it can get. Robert Goudie again urged the Committee to deal with the jobs/housing balance issue taking off from the existing 3 to 1 ratio. Heidi Merkel and staff did not see this as a pivot point for the task force work.

Fred Selden noted that development was going to have to be phased to the coming of Metrorail and road improvements and other public infrastructure improvements that would be difficult to achieve.