

## **Reston Master Plan Special Study Task Force**

### **Writing Group Meeting**

**September 4, 2013, 7 PM**

### **Reston Association**

**Attendees:** Nick Bauer, John Carter, Heidi Merkel, Patty Nicoson, Bill Penniman, Judith Pew, Dick Rogers, Joe's towers, Matt Valentini.

The meeting of the smaller group with set up to discuss among other issues, three that Heidi Merkel wanted to see voted on by the full task force. These were:

- **Point from Which to Measure Distance One Quarter Mile to ½ Mile Radius – Platform or Offset**
- **Hotel Uses Treated As Residential or Non-Residential**
- **Residential Versus Non-Residential Ratios at the Transit Station Areas**

Heidi Merkel said that she had met with Terry Maynard and Colin Mills, Board Member and President Respectively of the Reston Citizens Association to discuss the concerns that were laid out in Terry's statement to the task force at its August 13 meeting and in its 11-page letter. As a result of this, she would be changing some of the language in the sixth version of the draft planning text. However, there were some areas where staff would not be making changes.

Heidi said the sixth version would be available on Monday, September 9, the day before the task force meeting on September 10.

There was a desired to try and address the RCA issues. Dick Rogers asked if we could work out the differences before the Planning Commission Hearing on October 30. Heidi Merkel responded that if needed we could add additional meetings.

One area where there is disagreement is the amount of office space that is being counted to accommodate office worker. Terry had done a great deal of work looking up other studies and analyses from around the country. Staff had responded to his letters by citing some research they had done and said they were going to still stick with the 300 sq. ft. per employee model.

Dick Rogers noted that this would have far-reaching implications the difference between 300 ft.<sup>2</sup> per worker versus 150 square feet per worker. Office buildings were likely to have many more employees with far-reaching implications. How will staff respond? For instance, public transportation is totally inadequate. Dick said he thought the transit discussion in the comprehensive plan was an adequate. It was pointed out that staff is updating the transit development plan for the Reston area in 2014

Joe Stowers noted that we should be monitoring the employment densities. Heidi Merkel said that this topic is addressed in the transportation section of the draft text. She will look to see if it should be in other sections.

Matt Valentini said that he was taken aback by the tenor of the last task force meeting. He thought there was a lot of agreement on the project and its timeline. He wondered about the timeline. Would we meet our deadlines?

Bill Penniman suggested that we work to identify areas of large differences and those of agreement. He agreed that there was a lot of consensus, as did Joe Stowers. Noted that they were a lot that there was a lot of consensus. Joe's towers agreed.

John Carter asked about a deadline for the task force report. Heidi Merkel said the second week of October. John Carter urged us to address the issues. The time to be nice is over. We need to finish the plan. Nick Bauer's said he thought there was a general consensus on most issues but he saw up a concern about flexibility. A desire for more benchmarks. For example, in terms of joining a homeowners association, the Reston Association is one possibility.

### **1. Distance of the One Quarter and One Half Radii from the Platform or from the Offsets.**

Heidi Merkel said that the staff concern was that by measuring it from the offset, the desired concentration of development would be diluted. She thought there was some merit in talking about distances by blocks.

Bill Penniman noted the Arlington study that showed the drop off in ridership begins about five blocks away. If you think a block is 400 feet long, this would lead you out to about a 2000 ft.<sup>2</sup> radii. He was concerned about shrinking the area for place making. For example, at Wiehle Avenue, the only realistic way to see the impact of measuring from the platform would be in extending the East-West boundaries because the development is constrained on the South Side by Sunrise Valley Drive and on The North by Isaac Newton Square.

Matt Valentini suggested using the districts that staff had already designated for certain levels of development. They were some support for this idea. John Carter got up and drew the impact on piece of paper. How would this affect the property that straddled the one quarter mile radius? His point was that, if you measured from the platform the circle would expand to the North and South but not by much

Heidi found merit in Matt's point. She Noted That in Tysons Corner, despite the fact that the County TOD policy was to measure from the station platform, the Planning Commission had decided to measure from the station platforms. The Tyson situation is different. The stations are either in the middle of the road or on the side of a road; whereas in the Dulles corridor the stations are within the Dulles Access Highway Corridor which is nearly 400 feet wide. Heidi did like the idea of tying the development to the districts that had been mapped. She explained that the radii were used at first only to develop the TOD districts.

John Carter asked why the change in the location of measuring the radii would make a difference.

Joe Stowers said it was right to take out the ambiguity. Nick Bauer commented that there was a distinction between ambiguity and flexibility it was hard to determine where one went into the other.

**After much discussion, the group agreed to support the current measurement from the platform. Patty noted that there is flexibility already in the TOD guidelines in the Comprehensive Plan.**

### ***Hotel Uses-Treated As Residential or Nonresidential***

Staff assumed in the draft plan text that hotels would be considered a commercial use. Patty Nicoson mentioned Bill Penniman's point that these hotels would be located in a transit corridor with access from Dulles International Airport and to the Dulles Corridor and Downtown DC. Hotel visitors were likely to use transit to get around.

Do we understand the ramifications of the designation as residential versus non-residential? Bill Penniman noted that in the quarter to half-mile districts where the proposed mixed-use is 75 percent residential and 25 percent nonresidential, the incentive to build a hotel would be minimal. He was concerned that without hotels the environments would likely to be more sterile. Hotels do bring people to an area throughout the day and night and include restaurants and shops.

Did we know the trip generation characteristics of a hotel? Heidi Merkel responded that it depends on the type of hotel. Some have extensive conference facilities which would act more like commercial uses.

Heidi Merkel explained that in Tysons, the maximum FAR for commercial was 2.5. Residential and hotel did not have any restrictions.

John Carter noted that in Montgomery County, planners figure that there is one employee per 500 ft.<sup>2</sup> and for office uses 250 per square foot.

Patty Nicoson pointed out that Reston was under built with hotels as a result of the restrictions of the Reston Center for Industry and Government prohibition of residential and hotel uses along The Dulles Toll Road, which prevented hotels from being built. The covenants were overturned in 2011 allowing proposals to go forward with residential and/or hotel uses. She also noted that the task force wanted the plan encourage residential. If hotel were to take some of the allowable residential density that would decrease the amount of residential, a negative impact.

**The consensus of the group was that hotels should not be considered a residential use.**

### ***Residential Versus Nonresidential Uses at the Transit Station Areas***

Staff had proposed 50 percent residential and 50 percent nonresidential as the ratio for each of the transit station areas. There was discussion about how we could come up with the jobs housing balance. Heidi Merkel noted that region wide the ratio is 1.6 jobs per household. It would take a long time to achieve that in Reston.

Joe Stowers expressed his concern about the need to balance these uses and he thought that the plan text could use adjectives and adverbs to try and show how important was this balance.

John Carter pointed out that this, too, was a monitoring question. You could track what was happening and try to ensure this balance of uses as Reston redevelops. He thought it would be wonderful if you could say this plan is balance. The question is how to have the balance prevail.

Heidi Merkel said that the ratio in currently in the transit station areas was 14.1 jobs to one household and what is being proposed would result in four jobs per household in the transit station areas. However, the balance called for in Reston overall is 2.5 jobs per household.

Matt Valentini said he was still concerned about a developer coming in and grabbing the office density and then not using it to develop foreclosing options for another developer to build a mixed-use project. John Carter asked why we care about this issue. New line the group reached a consensus on leaving the residential versus nonresidential ratios as proposed by staff: 50-50 residential-nonresidential within a quarter-mile of the station and 75% residential-25% commercial in the areas between one quarter and ½ from the station.

It was noted that the transportation model had been run based on the staff proposal. They was no desire to go back and revisit this issue further delaying adoption of plan amendments. The group does want to see residential maximized. The task force report offers an opportunity to emphasize the importance of increasing the ratio of residential to office.

**The group concurred in leaving the ratios of office to residential within the quarter mile and half mile radii as proposed by staff in the draft Comprehensive Plan text.**

The rest of the meeting was spent discussing additional issues.

Judith Pew mentioned a number of think she was concerned about:

- Noise within buildings. Heidi Merkel responded that this was a building code issue, not a plan issue
- County facilities should work together to decide what mix of facilities were going to be placed in Reston Town Center North
- Reston Town Center North was not a place to place in urban elementary school. The land was too valuable. Heidi Merkel responded that staff had been considering a number of facilities for this area. The school staff is looking at how to provide an urban elementary school. This facility has not yet been eliminated from the potential mix in Town Center North. The school staff continues to look at this issue.
- Wish list. We need to spell out what we want in Reston Town Center and make sure that we keep the quality of life which Reston is known for. Heidi Merkel noted that in the policy plan there were urban parks standards and that The Parks Staff Would Be Looking at to use in Reston.
- Walkability was very important. We ought to be able to walk to the County facilities (recreation center, performing arts Center, etc.)
- We need to include what is special about Reston in the plan

Membership in the Reston Association or Town Center Association. Bill Penniman asked that whether some relief could be provided to developers who join the Reston Association Voluntarily. Heidi Merkel noted that there were some differences if a developer was going to be providing a number of parking recreation amenities for the residents such as swimming pools, volleyball courts, parks are plazas. Has the Reston Association had discussions with any of the developers? Joe Oates towers pointed out that there was a long history of the Reston Association working with developers to maximize recreational facilities have their residence be covered by Reston Association, (contributing to its dues structure and being able to use its facilities).

We agreed that the issue of a design review board needs to be addressed. This may be something to develop during a study of implementation measures after the Reston Comprehensive Plan Amendment is adopted

John Carter said that the group should spend some time working with Terry Maynard, Reston Citizens Association to address its issues. Patty noted that Dick Rogers was representing RCA at the meeting. (Patty had tried to set up a meeting with Terry Maynard but their vacation schedules conflicted.)

John Carter said that we should be able to point out that we accomplished say five things in preparing the plan to enhance the future of Reston.

- A balanced jobs/housing ratio-balance from the community's perspective emphasize plazas and place making as Bob Simon has suggested
- Construction of Certain Facilities community facilities that were important to the community. Make this much more aggressive in the plan, an effort that would put the corridor on the map
- Recreation Center
- University
- Design of Street Sections-complete streets as a special characteristic of Reston
- Addressing the Governance Issue
- Going for Reston development to achieve the sustainability envisioned in the Leeds neighborhood designation including: tree canopies, energy conservation, energy efficiency, place making,

John noted Greg Trimmers reference to trying to create the kind of streets, the more local streets, which are narrower and landscaped and encourage biking and walking.

Matt Valentini said that Reston Heights had achieved the neighborhood Leed status. Heidi Merkel noted that some projects could be providing things that the community wanted such as a performing arts center or significant part of a transportation facility, and yet still not meet all the criteria of a Leeds neighborhood. This would require thinking about the best way to mention the desirability of these sustainable features. She pointed to the Chuck Veatch residential project on Sunset Hills Road near the Wiehle station which was providing residential. John Carter responded that some leads-like elements for that project could be saving the stream that runs along Sunset Hills Road, providing tree canopy, and good building orientation.

Nick Bauer said that Reston does not currently meet tree canopy standard in Fairfax County.

Heidi Merkel said she would try to articulate the goals about the environment that we want to perpetuate. There should be enough language in the plan so that staff would not recommend against a project that provides significant amenities for the community. She mentioned staff's difficulty sometimes in interpreting plan language, particularly when a particular site may straddle district boundaries. We would not want to turn down a project that might not have all of the characteristics we desire if they do provide significant benefits to the community.

There is tension on whether as a function of the plan, a project must meet or not meet a criterion. She noted Terry Maynard's concern and his desire for more specificity, a sort of checklists to be met.

John Carter suggested that the plan be a bit more permissive to allow for some flexibility. Matt Valentini said we need to be thoughtful about the design of streets. Joe Stowers noted that there was a bike plan. Could that be incorporated?

Heidi Merkel said she would work with staff on these issues. Would we be able to add significant accomplishments or objectives to the plan, to the vision section? Patty suggested it might be part of a preamble to the plan.

Other RCA issues Terry Maynard had mentioned were: insufficient discussion of parks, which staff is working on. He liked the urban design standards. Terry would like to see something like a checklist, and Heidi does not see staff providing this.

In summary, we made decisions about the three issues Heidi Merkel had put forward. We decided to emphasize Leed neighborhood-type standards for Reston. John Carter will provide a paper on Leed neighborhood standards.

Patty Nicoson mentioned a friend of hers had said that the District of Columbia was doing a lot of work in the sustainability area-which included pedestrian and bicycle accessibility. John Carter suggested she look at the plans in the District of Columbia.

**Patty Nicoson will work with members of the group to develop a statement reflecting John Carters' ideas summarizing the major objectives that the plan seeks to accomplish.**

### **Next Meetings**

Patty Nicoson will present the decisions of the writing group on the issues that staff thought required action at the full task force meeting on September 10.

We will bring to them the idea of developing a statement that would indicate the most important things we think we are achieving in the plan affecting the sustainability and planning excellence of Reston in the future.

The writing group will meet again on September 17 and the task force will be meeting again on September 24 to discuss these issues. It was recognized that the task force may require more time to work through the issues. There was consensus that it was important to do this. We might also meet also in the first week of October.

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