Minority Report of Town Center Subcommittee

Reston Master Plan Special Study Task Force

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Revised May 6, 2011

Introduction to May 6, 2011 Revision of Minority Report

Based on review of my seven-month old minority report in light of many recent analyses and comments, I have one major refinement to make. I strongly recommend that the RMPS Task Force adopt Comprehensive Plan recommendations that differ from the Town Center subcommittee's report in one very important way: the ratio of residential to commercial gross square feet of all new development for the entire station area within about one-half mile of the Town Center rail station plus Town Center North should be as close as possible to 4:1.

A ratio this high for new development is required in order for the entire station area to gradually approach a balance between jobs and resident labor force. This recommendation is supported, to a greater or lesser extent, in quantitative terms by all known credible analysis that has come to light over the last year.

In contrast, the Town Center report recommends, in somewhat over-simplified terms, that the ratio of all development within about one-quarter mile of the station achieve a minimum ratio of 1:1 for residential to commercial square feet.

Several participants have properly emphasized the importance of the Task Force focusing on the one-quarter mile area. This has been based on the importance of encouraging concentration of new development around the station within walking distance to the rail station.

However, this minority report recommendation is driven by the importance of maximizing walk to work trips, which requires focusing on the area within one-half mile or more of the high density of job sites in Town Center. This is even more important in terms of reducing motor vehicle trips in the peak period on approaches to Town Center.

Several clarifications and explanations are necessary in order to make this recommendation as clear as possible to Task Force members, County staff, and other concerned officials and persons interested in this issue:

(1) This recommendation applies to the larger Town Center station area within one-half mile of the station (and beyond in the case of Town Center North), not just to the roughly one-quarter mile of the station which was the primary focus of the Town Center subcommittee's report.

(2) In order to assess the compatibility of this recommendation with the Town Center subcommittee report recommendations, Fairfax County staff should perform an analysis of this compatibility, and follow this up with a report back to the Task Force.

(3) The importance of focusing this recommendation on just the Town Center station area needs to be emphasized. Much of the recent discussion of balance of uses has unfortunately expanded to the entire three-station corridor area, and some of the recent discussion of this balance issue has even more unfortunately expanded to the entire Reston area. Balance of uses is also important for these larger geographic areas, but these discussions have been misguided because they appear to be based on the very mistaken assumption that geographic scale is not important.

(4) Ideally there should be a balance of jobs and resident labor force at all 3 of these geographic scales. But because Town Center is so much more important in terms of the magnitude of both existing and planned commercial development and its impact on congestion, it is much more important that this balance be achieved there. And most importantly, it is not possible to correct for a significant lack of residential development in Town Center by achieving more residential development in either the other 2 station areas or elsewhere in Reston. Trying to do that will not reduce the congestion caused by lack of balance of uses in Town Center; it will simply cause more additive congestion from each of the areas that lack balance between jobs and resident labor force, as I will attempt to explain below.

(5) This issue cannot be fully understood or resolved quantitatively without detailed and careful transportation travel analysis. To fully appreciate this requires understanding that very different trade-offs in travel behavior are involved at these 3 different geographic scales:

(a) At the individual one-half mile station area analysis level the critical trade-off is between peak-period walking trips and all other non-walking trips, because of the very short distances involved.

(b) At the three-station corridor level the critical trade-off expands slightly to include all non-motorized peak-period trips (including both bike trips and bus trips) and motor vehicle trips, because of the somewhat greater distances involved. Achieving balance of uses only at the larger 3-station area will create more overall auto congestion than achieving this balance at each of the individual station areas.

(c) At the Reston-wide level the critical trade-off changes primarily to the analysis of Reston-area motor vehicle miles of travel – in other words, better balance of uses can create more internal (i.e., within Reston) peak-period short trips and fewer long-distance internal to external motor vehicle trips. However, overall peak-period auto congestion will be most severe if balance of uses is achieved only at this larger scale, because of failure to achieve balance in each of the 3 station areas.

(6) The importance of these differences in scale and the very different technical issues involved cannot be evaluated without application of state-of-the-art analytical techniques, such as those recommended to be used in the Vision subcommittee's report including its appendix.

(7) These considerations also require serious consideration of demand management policies and their application at each geographic scale, as well as serious consideration of infrastructure and details of transit operations – e.g., bike facility connections, local street grids, and bus routes and schedules.

In conclusion of this revision there are three key things to recognize in order to accept this recommendation:

(a) The subcommittee's basic recommendation is <u>an end-state balance (for an unstated future period) and is a minimum of a 1:1 residential to commercial</u> (essentially office) ratio of gross square feet; whereas my recommendation is for achievement of a <u>target ratio for all new development of 4:1 residential to commercial</u> (of all types) gross square feet.

(b) The subcommittee's recommendation has been developed during a period when primary attention was being given to the interests of current property owners within ¼ mile of the Town Center station plus Town Center North; whereas my recommendation is based on the interests of Restonians in how the greater Town Center area – an area that is roughly four times as large as the area within 1/4 mile of the station;

(c) Without setting any target or even a desirable range of the residential to commercial ratio for all new development in the greater Town Center area, the subcommittee does point out in its final draft that its recommendations do provide the opportunity for a great deal of additional residential development, particularly in those areas beyond the ¼ mile circle around the Town Center station.

Recognizing these and other factors, I would like to add one further recommendation:

The Task Force and County staff should perform an additional analysis in the remaining part of the Phase 1 work program to help determine whether these two sets of recommendations are either (a) consistent with each other, or (b) can be made consistent with each other through refinements and/or the addition of further recommendations such as greater incentives for substantial residential development in the most suitable parts of the greater Town Center area.

The rest of this Minority Report has been edited from the September 2010 version to be consistent with the above recommendations and to be consistent with the current status of other Task Force products.

<u>Overview of the Minority Report</u>

I support the Report of the Town Center Subcommittee in general and believe that it contains many valuable contributions to the Reston Master Plan Special Study Task Force Task Force's recommendations. I think in many ways it should be seen as a model for the other subcommittees and for the first phase final report of the Task Force.

However, I would like to offer (a) a very different recommendation regarding residential - commercial balance, and (b) add several specific suggested additions to the subcommittee's report regarding planning and urban design considerations.

In submitting this minority report, I want to express appreciation for the opportunities that the subcommittee gave me and everyone else to express our views and have them fully considered and, when appropriated, voted upon, in the process of attempting to reach consensus. I particularly appreciate the extraordinary efforts of co-chair Robert Goudie who made special efforts to give me these opportunities, even to the extent of taking considerable time to talk to me and leave long detailed telephone update reports on the final work of the subcommittee in drafting its report while I was on the West Coast last summer during the last 2 weeks of their work on the subcommittee's first draft report.

Residential – Commercial Balance

I strongly disagree with the subcommittee's recommendation in this area. After much debate of this issue as the several subcommittee reports have been presented and discussed, I believe there is an opportunity for the Task Force to reconcile and adopt both the Town Center recommendation and my recommendations with relatively modest changes to make clear that the apparent conflicts can be, and will be, resolved in the language to be adopted in modifications to the Comprehensive Plan.

Considerations Relating to Balance of Uses

For several reasons a great deal more care should be given to achieving an overall balance between residential and commercial development in Reston Town Center, and this recommendation should be based specifically on Town Center conditions rather than on experience in other Transit-Oriented Developments (TODs) which all have quite different characteristics.

Although precise numbers are not readily available, there are probably about 4 jobs in Reston Town Center currently for every Town Center resident in the labor force, based on data provided to the subcommittee by Mark Looney in a June 3, 2010 email.[1]

In order to minimize the motor vehicle congestion in the Town Center over the long term it is ***critical*** to move much closer to a 1:1 balance in this jobs-to-residential-labor-force ratio. Every significant step in this direction will increase the proportion of people who (a) walk to work, (b) use transit getting to work, and (c) drive very short distances to work. Of course, not every person will walk to work, but we know from experience that the percent of people who do walk to work goes up as an area moves closer to this balance. This is also true regarding its effect on increasing transit use and increasing the percent of people who make very short auto trips to work. This is not an assumption; it is based on sound logic that has been tested over several years using urban transportation models in many, many cities throughout the developed world.

[1] This estimate is based on Mark Looney's tabulations of 4.512, 010 square feet of office, 852,883 square feet of retail, and 2,966 dwelling units, plus my assumptions for Town Center of 1.5 persons in the labor force per dwelling unit and 1.0 jobs per 300 square feet of combined office and retail space.

Based on documented experience in the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor and in other areas around the country, an achievement of this goal can probably result in a slight reduction from current levels of congestion even with a doubling of employment and a quadrupling of residential development in Town Center. These are reasonable targets to plan for over the next 40 years and are generally consistent with available forecasts of growth in the Dulles corridor. It can also result in the greatest overall increase in a vibrant living and working environment and financial success of the retail market.

Although we know that relatively little development is likely to occur over the next 2 or 3 years, and we know that market conditions will vary from decade to decade, a reasonable approximate target goal would be to reduce the ratio of jobs to resident labor force in Town Center from about 4:1 now to close to 1:1 in about 40 years at roughly the same rate each decade (i.e., to 3:1 by 2020; to 2:1 by 2030, and close to 1:1 by 2040).[2]

I recommend that Fairfax County refine these and other rough estimates presented here before adopting any recommendation regarding balance of uses. And, perhaps more importantly, I recommend that the Comprehensive Plan be amended to require mid-course corrections, as Arlington County did for the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor.

These mid-course corrections should be performed each decade to assess the degree to which progress has been made in achieving this target for jobs-to-resident-labor-force balance and reducing auto commuting to work in Town Center. Each such review should result in recommendations for whatever changes in land development policy are appropriate to better achieve the target goal for job-to-resident-labor-force balance and congestion reduction.

For the next decade I recommend setting a target goal in the Comprehensive Plan of achieving a balance of about 4:1 in residential-to-commercial gross square feet for new development for Town Center as a whole.

The above recommendation is a sharp contrast with the recommendation of the Town Center subcommittee on this subject. To risk oversimplification, that recommendation is a goal of achieving a residential-to-commercial ratio of 1:1 for gross square feet for all development (i.e., old plus new development at some unstated time in the future). This translates into a continuing imbalance in the ratio of jobs to labor force of about 2:1.

The Town Center subcommittee's recommendation may seem reasonable because the continuing imbalance of 2:1 in the most important metric of balance for new development is below the existing ratio of about 4:1 and would gradually lower that overall Town Center ratio.

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[2] The recommended overall Town Center gross square foot ratio of 4:1 for new development is chosen because I believe it would result in steady progress in slightly reducing congestion. However, one might ask what the lowest gross square foot ratio that ***might*** result in preventing congestion from worsening? My analysis, which can be tested by application of state-of-the-art urban transportation models, suggests that a GSF ration of between 2.5:1 and 3:1 ***might*** be able to do this, but many unknowns and uncertainties are involved, and I have much less confidence in making this statement.

However, this is far from being a reasonable recommendation. In terms of impact on congestion, it is the TOTAL imbalance between jobs and resident labor force that counts, not the ratio. If this goal recommended by the subcommittee was to be implemented, every 1000 more jobs would result in many more auto commuters to Town Center (probably more than 500) and would reduce the proportion of new jobs that are accessed by transit, walking, or bicycling.

This is not a minor problem. Approaches to Town Center are already severely congested, at least for the peak period (probably more so than any TOD in the Rosslyn – Ballston corridor, with the possible exception of Rossyln). ***This trend simply could not continue, because the Town Center subcommittee's recommendations for residential-to-commercial "balance" (really imbalance) would result in continuing increases in congestion. Extreme congestion over longer peak periods would result and investment in office development (and probably other types of development) in Town Center would decrease at a steady rate until it ceased completely.***

The only way for Reston Town Center to grow over the next generation and beyond is for it to continue to gain more residents in the labor force than jobs and thus more walk-to-work trips! This point is gradually being understood and accepted by several of the other Task Force members and other interested participants because of the sheer logic of this well-understood transportation planning relationship. ***Yet the subcommittee report seems to ignore this logic and look to much less expert sources who pay little attention to the very different specific circumstances involved in other TODs such as the much smaller and generally less congested nodes in Arlington's R-B corridor.***

How did this Town Center subcommittee recommendation come about? It certainly does not reflect the community's interests.

The Town Center subcommittee was originally organized representing only Town Center's stakeholders, and its work program consisted largely of a series of dialogs with the principal current commercial property owners in the larger Town Center core area -- mostly property owners of office campuses and one property owner of a large retail center. None were residential developers and only one very brief dialog with a major mixed-use developer occurred, and even this dialog did not include any discussion related to this subject.

At no time in this process did anyone bring up the history of Reston's emphasis on balanced mixed-use development, which was fundamental to Reston's original Master Plan. Few if any others on the subcommittee understood how important Town Center's success can be traced to a Mobil Oil Vice President's directive that Reston Land (at that time the principal developer) had to form a partnership with a nationally accomplished mixed-use developer before it could proceed with the planning and development of Town Center.

Few if any others understood how much the transition from the first phase of Town Center's development, which was purely commercial, to gradually becoming a truly balanced mixed-use center was largely the result of community pressure to humanize Town Center – i.e., to use residential development to make it more lively, safer, and more successful, and to reduce congestion by creating walk trips to work.

At no time in the Town Center subcommittee's work program did anyone point out that experience all over the country, as in Reston Town Center, demonstrates that true balanced mixed-use development is generally more profitable than either single use or dominant use office development, or pure residential development, or pure retail development. This is true not only because of the ability of developers to take advantage of changes in the market, but much more importantly because everyone benefits. Homebuyers and renters are willing to pay more to live where they can save money by owning fewer cars and using them much less often. Employers are willing to pay more because their employees are more able to get to work on time and work a little later because they don't have to drop everything to catch their car pools. And retailers and restaurants have a great built-in around-the-clock and weekend market.

And at no time did the subcommittee discuss the importance of encouraging office developers to form partnerships with residential and/or mixed-use developers so that they could be successful and more profitable in achieving balanced development in Town Center.

As the leaders of the subcommittee were finalizing the definition of what the goal should be for residential-to-commercial balance the decision was apparently based primarily on what the principal property owners (mostly the office developers) were willing to accept.

In my opinion the RMPSS Task Force decision on what to recommend for the goal for Town Center's balance of uses should be based on the perspectives of both the community and property owners with particular attention to the perspectives of residential and experienced, successful mixed-use developers. Many of these people are still living in Reston or can easily be contacted.

During our 2-week trip to the Northwest last summer, we spent a busman's holiday touring TODs in the Portland metropolitan area (where I had played a significant role in the early planning of the transit and land use development program in the 1970s). What we found is that most of that development conforms with my recommendations on balanced uses. In the newly redeveloping large historic Pearl District along a new light rail line near Union Station, about 75 percent of the new development, ***including significant amounts of current construction,*** is residential, mostly with ground floor retail and related services. We found the area so attractive and lively that we took time to return to enjoy a few more hours there again after a trip to the mouth of the Columbia River and the beaches.

This recent Portland observation is completely consistent with my long-term observations of how most or all of the major West Coast metropolitan areas have been developing over the last generation. Enormous concentrations of new residential and mixed-use development with strong residential components have been transforming these cities into lively and economically successful centers.

As a result of observing this current and recent trend, I'm inclined to think that residential and other TOD can now be successful in any area that has a good track record of planning, coordinating, and implementing transit and TOD policies -- developers, banks, and the market will all respond. This may soon be possible again in our Town Center.

What we are now calling Metro South was recognized about 15 year ago in a well-attended charrette as being a great future place for a successful urban residential TOD village. I believe Town Center North also got some recognition in that regard at the time as well. They deserve to be even more recognized as such today -- great places to live, work, and play, while saving Reston Town Center from choking on auto congestion.

Finally on this subject, I want to put aside an argument that has been made in support of allowing an increase in the existing commercial-to-residential imbalance by at least one T.C. subcommittee member – i.e., that congestion in the Town Center area can be reduced by encouraging greater use of rail. Like most of credible rail transit forecasts around the country, congestion in the Silver Line corridor including Reston has been forecast to become more severe over the next 20 years. The only way this forecast congestion increase can be eliminated is by rigorously pursuing improved balance between jobs and resident labor force over this forecast period along with vigorous application of demand management programs.

General Planning and Urban Design Recommendations

The subcommittee's report could be much improved by adding options that have been put forward by members and non-members of the subcommittee. Examples include (a) the addition of strong incentives for achieving consolidated plans for each of the several major sub-areas of Town Center such as Metro North, Metro South, and Town Center North; (b) stronger incentives for moving further and faster toward residential - commercial balance; (c) different configurations of open space in Town Center North, such as the proposal of having 4 Savannah style small parks -- one in each quadrant of the area -- to bring usable open space closer to most parcels; provide traffic calming by blocking several of the possible straight line cut-through routes; and giving greater identity to small neighborhoods; and (d) adding alleys where appropriate to provide a better fine grain to the street grid and provide additional pedestrian shortcuts.

Additional design guidelines should be added, such as those provided to supplement the Comprehensive Plan language adopted about 3 years ago for the revitalization of Lake Anne Village Center. A primary example is language discouraging bulky mid-rise buildings in favor of both taller and shorter heights. The strongest guideline option might be that suggested by Reston's original master planner Bill Conklin in the guidelines for Lake Anne revitalization -- i.e., no building should be built between 4 stories and 14 stories. Another example might be specific suggestions for different design features that would create a sense of place where most appropriate in each major sub-area of Town Center, such as dimensions for open space of different kinds and arrangements of prominent buildings along secondary "Market Streets" in each major sub-area (see last paragraph of this section), and at the ends of important streets such as Stratford House at the east end of Market Street. Other examples are a listing of features that create a sense of place and suggestions for the placement of art in public places.

The subcommittee's report shows little appreciation of the TOD achievements that have been made in numerous other metropolitan areas, such as on the West Coast. Nor does it reflect many of the very important achievements and transferable lessons learned in developing the new Tysons Corner plan, particularly the need to drastically change the

severe imbalance in residential - commercial development -- the major cause of the current congestion and the most important policy change that can mitigate further increases in congestion while permitting continuing growth.

The Town Center subcommittee report gives proper attention to the need for north-south improvements in connectivity with the Urban Core, but fails to recognize that the proximity and connectivity with the Urban Core are essential to support the recommendations for increased densities in Town Center North. Such arguments are essential to counter challenges being made by others to allowing such density increases in an area well beyond the half-mile distance from the Town Center rail station.

The short walk to the jobs and other attractions of the core are far more important than the length of the walk (or bus ride) to the station. Once this point is put forward and accepted, the most obvious missing recommendation is that Town Center North can provide the most important location for housing the missing resident labor force for jobs in the Urban Core, Metro North, and Metro South. The Comprehensive Plan should encourage a higher concentration of residential development (e.g., a gross square foot ratio of about 6:1 residential-to-commercial gross square feet for all new development, thereby making the largest contribution to achieving the recommended ratio of 4:1 gross square feet for new development in greater Town Center district as a whole.

The subcommittee report should offer more guidance for how the walking and biking experience of streets throughout newly developing parts of Town Center could be improved, in part by applying the lessons learned from the success of the Urban Core, particularly the first phase from Presidents Street to Library Street. Some of the streets most in need of such improvements are the north-south connections between Freedom Drive and Town Center North. Explorer Street in particular is in need of a road diet and the addition of retail and service activities between Freedom Drive and New Dominion Parkway.

The subcommittee report should also offer more specific guidance for traffic calming on the arterials surrounding the Urban Core, particularly New Dominion Parkway (speedway), but also Town Center Parkway and Bluemont Way. One suggestion might be to introduce rougher surfaces at selected intersections such as is widely done in Europe and elsewhere. We may not be willing to pay for cobblestone as European countries do, but a much less costly alternative might be the use of stamped concrete surfacing.

Incidentally, we have to get beyond the subcommittee report's desire to please VDOT officials who resist urban street recommendations like more substantial traffic calming and much closer spacing of signals where needed to protect pedestrian movements and to provide a desired measure of traffic calming. As Supervisor Cathy Hudgins has suggested, Fairfax County should be more aggressive in specifying desired street and arterial design guidelines in urban areas, particularly since VDOT has so little money to build anything.

To make some further contribution to reducing the shortage of residential in the Urban Core, a recommendation should be added to encourage any new residential buildings to be built at the highest practical and allowable densities, consistent with other objectives.

For example, the current market might encourage short-term stick-built residential on the undeveloped land immediately south of Town Square between Explorer and St. Francis streets. The County should consider Comprehensive Plan language to try to prevent this from happening and thus delaying the construction of highest and best use residential densities.

This last point introduces another broad shortcoming of the subcommittee's report. In many ways it is a trend-based projection rather than a planning document. Many statements are made favoring market solutions or “organic growth,” which are not always the best solutions. For example trend-based forecasts by GMU and others are used for guides on balance of uses rather than being seen as a warning of problems that may need to be corrected. Very little is said about recommendations for how the design review process, tax incentives, and subsidies can be used to achieve recognized goals and objectives. Language should be added encouraging the County to look for new ways of creating incentives.

An assumption (or office developer's wish?) is made in the subcommittee report that the market for commercial will (always?) be stronger and precede a strong market for residential. This was obviously not true during the last growth cycle of the mid-1990s to mid-2000s. Over the long haul these market shifts are bound to be in balance.

The maps that have been prepared to supplement the subcommittee's text report should be augmented to show selected examples of the above recommended additions to the report including the Savannah-style small parks described in (c) of the first paragraph of this section, and secondary "Market Streets" extending directly south of the Town Center rail station into the center of Metro South and another extending along either Explorer or Library streets, or both, from Metro North through the Urban Core into Town Center North.

Finally, I have eliminated my original serious critique of the Town Center subcommittee’s negative stance and opposition to air rights development in the Town Center station area because, in the subcommittee’s final draft report, that opposition was removed.

However, personal statements that have been made since then by developer members of the subcommittee and other developer task force members have raised opposition to public support of air rights development. Their statements have made it clear that they are concerned about possible competition from air rights development.

I believe that public support for Town Center air rights development would substantially enhance their development opportunities if it were to be planned in a cooperative manner. I see no reason for them to fear that such cooperation would not occur, given the fine recent history of such cooperation between developers and the public sector for all aspects of station planning. Our elected leaders have long recognized that air rights development has great potential for all stakeholders especially including adjoining property owners.