

**Preliminary Comment on “Draft” Town Center Task Force
Sub-Committee Report**

**The Reston Town Center
(North & South)
RMPSSSTF Sub Committee
Report**

Prepared for:
The Reston Master Plan Special Study Task Force

By:
Reston 2020 Committee
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To: Robert Goudie and Peter Otteni, Co-Chairs and the Town Center Committee,
Reston Master Plan Special Study Task Force

Introduction:

We wish to commend the Committee for the substantial work it has accomplished in just a few months. The Committee's expanded mandate covering not just the original charge of Town Center North, but ultimately all of Town Center and areas south of the planned Metro Rail station to Sunrise Valley Drive is arguably the trickiest and most complex of that assigned to any Task Force Committee. The Committee addressed some thorny issues and has come up with some creative proposals in this draft as it heads for review and consideration by the full Task Force.

Our comments are intended to provide useful additional perspectives and contribute to plugging some gaps and making the final report even stronger, one that fully responds to the needs of the and future residents of Town Center and, indeed, all of Reston.

*****For your convenience, we have included a summary of our recommendations in the conclusion of our discussion, p. 10**

Overview:

The Executive Summary of the report sets a worrisome tone. The reader is reminded no less than seven times in the first five paragraphs of the need for the community to "incent" or provide incentives to landowners to develop in the Town Center area. One wonders what extraordinary sacrifices the Committee will ask of them and what price will be exacted in exchange. The report as drafted does not satisfy the layman's curiosity on this point.

The over-riding concern the content of the draft report leaves us with is: Will the proposed Town Center with Metrorail work? We don't believe the report adequately addresses critical issues that must be clearly resolved if we are to answer the workability question in the affirmative. The critical issues are:

- 1. Connectivity**
- 2. Public Transportation: Buses - Internal / External links**
- 3. Balanced Growth**

Other matters we believe need major attention by the Committee or the full Task Force include planning for the area called Town Center North (between New Dominion Parkway and Baron Cameron Avenue), open space, and planning for civic and community facilities (especially in the Town Center North area).

Otherwise we have a few suggestions and wish to note some proposals we think are particularly worthy of endorsement by the community.

1. Connectivity:

An overarching concern: the lack of safe, attractive connectivity, especially for pedestrians and bicyclists, among four distinct segments of Town Center and provision for internal public transportation which will be absolutely essential to make the new Town Center workable. The original design of Town Center does not seem to have contemplated this growth coming south and north of the urban core. The report does not adequately address the fact that area between the rail station and Baron Cameron to the north is broken up by three major road barriers:

- Sunset Hills Road
- Bluemont Way
- New Dominion Parkway

Going north from the station, a pedestrian bridge over Sunset Hills may forge a link to a proposed plaza beside the station. This will help and certainly serve the Boston Properties retail, commercial and residential developments adjoining the station itself. However, Bluemont Way, a four lane road with the current bus station, forms a barrier to the urban core on the north of the BP development. There is no proposal put forward to deal with this comprehensively. There is no northward linkage for vehicles, bikes or people, except for a possible road on the eastern edge proposed by BP to connect their possible hotel/convention center with the Hyatt complex. [We recommend that, in addition to the Discovery Road connection, there be safe, substantial and attractive pedestrian and bicycle links from the station area to Explorer Street, Library Street, and Fountain Drive on the east with all grade-separated crossings. These must be in place when the station opens in late 2016 or early 2017.](#)

Then, one proceeds through the heart of the existing urban core until hitting discouraging acres of huge garages fortifying the formidable, fast-moving New Dominion Parkway barrier—4-5 lanes of high intensity traffic. This has the feel of an international boundary, and at ½ mile from the station the combination of ugly structures and a wide expanse of moving traffic, will surely take a toll on pedestrians, even bikers coming from/going to the station. Some traffic calming measures (“road diet”) are suggested along New Dominion, but only for a few blocks and they seem inadequate to attract pedestrians and bicyclists going north or south. As a result, Town Center North with its proposed new, higher density development is cut off from easy access to the urban core and the station. Here, too, either pedestrian-bike bridges are needed or somehow New Dominion must be shrunk and made more of a tree-lined neighborhood lane. All of this road-crossing infrastructure must somehow be paid for. In the first instance, the Committee’s vision of a unified station north and urban core will not happen without the linkages we propose. Business in both areas will benefit, or suffer, depending on these links; so, it seems not unreasonable that those who benefit shoulder the cost. [We recommend that necessary road crossing infrastructure be paid for by commercial interests.](#)

South of the new station, there is the impassable barrier of the rail, Toll Road and the Dulles Access Road effectively sealing the north off from the fourth republic, South Town Center, extending down to Sunrise Valley Drive. That area is lost without bridge, air rights and/or tunnel links for people and cars. Additional crossings of the Dulles Toll

Roads are clearly needed but are not discussed beyond mention of a possible but problematic tunnel or bridge connecting Town Center Parkway to Edmund Halley Drive. It is hard to imagine what the already heavily congested Reston Parkway will become without additional roads linking the north and south sides both immediately west and east of the Parkway. We think it unfortunate that the Committee did not directly confront this overwhelming issue. No one it seems is willing to stand up and say the obvious— **we need major funding for critical public transportation infrastructure** or the great, highly profitable things on all the wish lists to build will either not happen or they will at great cost to the people and the environment of Reston.

Therefore, **we recommend that the Task Force as a whole, since this cloud also hangs over the Wiehle Station area, put together a list of at least the north-south road connections which are preconditions to the functioning of the new development in the station area and, indeed, to the functioning of the community of Reston.** This list should then be discussed with the appropriate County and Commonwealth transportation officials to determine the feasibility and likely timing of effecting such connections. The report of the Committee and final report of the Task Force then should begin with a straightforward statement of those essential needs and state that without them the development proposed in the report cannot go forward. Then, let the discussion begin!

Safe, substantial and attractive crossings are also needed for pedestrians and bicycle traffic across the great gorge. When the rail station opens there will be a pedestrian and presumably bicycle passageway through it. Metro, however, will keep it open only during the hours trains operate. We do not see that as a major problem as it seems unlikely that there will be great demand for it in the wee hours between midnight and 5 AM. However, there should be safe and substantial pedestrian and bicycle ways across the Reston Parkway and Wiehle Avenue bridges which include crossings of access ramps not at grade to get on and off the bridges. **We recommend that these safe crossings for pedestrians and bicyclists be included as strong suggestions for Fairfax County funding in the Committee's final report. Furthermore, we believe the Committee should emphatically endorse the suggestions made by residents and developer JBG for a pedestrian and bicycle connection from Reston Heights to Plaza America. Here again, we believe this piece of infrastructure should be paid for by the businesses who stand to directly benefit from them.**

2. Public Transportation: Buses – Internal / External Buses

While the draft report recognizes that additional bus service will be needed, we believe that it seriously understates the need. Bus systems must be designed to attract, not repel riders (See Reston 2020's Meeting the Needs of a 21st Century Planned Community). While the Committee draft report gives some attention to pedestrian/bike connectivity, including recommendations for bike lanes and facilities for bicyclists, there is only limited treatment of bus service as a key solution to moving people around the growing, segmented Town Center.

A connector bus offering frequent shuttle service between the Metro station and Town Center North, including intervening urban core stops is essential. It is one mile from Metro to Baron Cameron. As noted above, few will walk this unattractive route. Bus routes and stops that will not obstruct other traffic are essential. Similarly, as

development occurs south of the station, it will be essential to have the same service extended there—or indeed development will in fact be hindered. [We recommend that specific recommendations for bus-only streets and lanes be added to this report.](#)

[A major omission is the absence of any plan for linking the current bus terminal at Bluemont Way to the new one at Metro.](#) Apparently, the thinking is that buses will trundle along overcrowded main streets (Reston Parkway, Sunset Hills, and Town Center Parkway) rather than taking a more direct route. This could be addressed by utilizing the extended Discovery Street with appropriate turning points and bus-only periods, or requiring Boston Properties to include a bus-only Library Street extension under its proposed plaza platform. Or, the two stations could, and probably should, be combined. [The Committee needs to address this issue and give the full Task Force a recommendation for action. More specificity is needed on the workings of attractive and frequent service to effectively connect the growing diversity of Town Center. Further, if Town Center is not to be inundated with traffic and related parking, bus service from surrounding areas of Reston, Fairfax and Loudoun must be made more convenient, \(See 2020 Transportation Paper\), and the internal pedestrian-bicycle system within developed properties must interconnect comfortably with adjacent development, with the rail station, and with the Reston trail/sidewalk system.](#)

[We recommend that a robust bus service be developed, probably as a joint effort of Fairfax County and the private sector.](#) Improved bus service, especially within Town Center, cannot be left to Fairfax County which seems unable to meet existing needs. The report should require, as we do, that the private sector pull together with the County to mount an efficient, attractive service to keep people moving and cars from taking over.

3. Balanced Growth

The 1:1 residential to commercial relationship posited in the draft report would mean that future growth would bring twice as many people to work in Town Center as to live there—that is an estimated 4 people working in each 1,000 GSF and 2 people living in 1,000 GSF space. At present the ratio of commercial space to residential on the ground in Town Center is somewhere around 12:1, a long way from balanced. It seems we already have a lot of catching up to do if:

- businesses in Reston Town Center are to have more walk-in trade;
- commuter traffic on Reston's main roads, especially around RTC, are to have balanced peak period traffic rather than being overloaded in one direction; and,
- We are to have more successful Metrorail and other public transit as RTC residents like those in Arlington shift their travel patterns.

Joe Stowers, Terry Maynard and various other Reston residents including urban planners who have looked at this issue and are knowledgeable on this subject, have recommended a substantial increase in the residential side of the ratio. We agree. This is a critical element in making RTC and Reston workable. [We recommend the Committee adopt at least 2:1, residential to commercial ratio, in its final report, and that the Task Force do the same.](#)

Additional Topics of Concern are:

4. **Town Center North: Density, Parks and Civic Use**
5. **Other Open Space and Parkland**
6. **Density of TC as a Sub-Unit**
7. **Governance**
- ***8. **Conclusion: Summary of Recommendations**

4. Town Center North: An Opportunity lost; Density, Park and Civic Concerns

A. Density: TCN

As the draft report indicates, “open space is at a premium in Town Center” (green space in particular). The report calls TCN an area of transition from the high density urban core (and also from the high density planned for the new Spectrum development on TCN’s eastern edge). It is over ½ mile from the station, yet is being proposed for density associated with TOD areas. Half the land in the area designated TCN is owned by Fairfax County, including a total of about 8 1/2 acres of park land and protected natural area. The other half is owned by INOVA, owner of the Cameron Glen nursing facility. The committee recommends an F.A.R. of 0.9 for INOVA’s 20 acres, about 1.25 million sq. ft. of non-residential space and about 2,000 residential units. [We question the fairly high density this far from the station. It is likely to generate more car trips. Furthermore, it is conceivable that development in this area could sap the energy from areas closer to the station where more and earlier development is desirable.](#)

B. Parks: TCN

However, if the Committee decides to go ahead backing this density and the 200-foot building heights proposed, we strongly recommend that it be done with the understanding that the plan take advantage of the potential here to create extraordinary park areas to provide relief from the intensity of development to the south and east. Specifically, [we recommend that the FCPA 5-acre park on the eastern edge bordering Spectrum be improved and take advantage of its sloping topography to become a cascades-type park with a water feature serving the new Spectrum retail and residential developments as well as TCN and all of Reston.](#) (Reston 2020 has documented alternative proposals for greening of TCN as has Guy Rando, a leading Reston landscape architect.) And, we endorse the planned town green or mall running north-south in the center of TCN and recommend that it be wide enough to accommodate modest recreational/athletic activities such as bocce, badminton and others appropriate to the town green concept proposed by the Committee. We believe urban park facilities will fit well with the relatively dense plans of INOVA, especially if the latter makes use of greater building heights proposed by the Committee, building up to free land for open space.

If the Committee does not move to take advantage of an extraordinary opportunity to use available land to add signature features in a beautiful way to serve not only Town Center, but all of Reston. The county has protected as parkland or designated forest an area totaling 8 ½ acres in TCN that we do not want to lose. [We recommend this](#)

opportunity to create a special open space/park for future generations. Everyone keeps saying more parkland is needed—in this case, it is ours to lose.

There is also the question of “Diamond Park” (the open space adjoining the Paramount on the north side). This is technically outside the TCN area and is assigned to the library. Keep as park land or develop as commercial? Then there is the parcel of the Reston Regional library and the Library Park, part of which may form the mall or southern end of town green, but much of which is not accounted for in the draft report. These parcels should be openly factored into the final report for Town Center, where open space is “at a premium”.

C. Civic: TCN

Likewise, we commend the Committee for proposing a major community center/county government services building at the northern end of the lovely town green and perhaps a public square, creating congenial community gathering places serving all of Reston. What is lacking, and was not really explored by the Committee, is at least a conceptual framework to recommend to Fairfax County for the large area of land it controls on the western half of TCN. [We recommend that the Committee engage the County in a dialogue on its plans, along with the Committee's and community participants' suggestions.](#) The product of such conversations should be a concept outline in the final report for civic/governmental uses in western TCN. [We strongly endorse the Committee's opposition to the County maintaining a fuel depot in the new TCN where it is clearly no longer appropriate.](#) The Committee backed away from a taking a strong stand on the proposal for a large, secure suburban style, one-story police station. We recommend that the Committee or Task Force leadership engage the County Supervisor and ask that [either the police station be redesigned to be more appropriate to the new TCN setting or relocated.](#) We offer some additional comments on potential public facilities below.

5. Other Open Space and Parkland

In Metro North, Boston Properties is proposing a major plaza in D-4/D-5 which will be a distinct urban asset. We would hope that other open spaces will be reserved as well. [The final report should specify open space plans as suggested by the Fairfax County Park Authority \(FCPA\).](#) One possibility is to require construction of ‘vest pocket’ parks along the W & OD trail. This would create in effect an attractive green strip through Town Center.

On the South side of the station only cursory discussion of parks has occurred. There is some agreement on, and [we recommend creating green open spaces along the southern edge by Sunrise Valley Drive.](#) We would like the Committee to firm this up in the final report, especially in light of the proposal coming out of the Herndon-Monroe Committee and now gaining support in the Wiehle Avenue Committee for making Sunrise Valley Drive a “grand boulevard” with attractive setback areas and other features. The Town Center Committee’s discussion included possibly creating a large park area centrally located as suggested by the FCPA. Landowners, however, were reluctant to include it without understanding who among them would have to “sacrifice” how much land to make it happen. Since prospects of making use of chunks of USGS

property appear highly unlikely, [the full Task Force should consider putting the central park concept in the final report for the south.](#)

**6. Density Concerns and General Character of Town Center:
Urban Core; North Station; South of the Station**

Since density recommendations are not yet available for the entire area, we reserve comment for now. However, it is clear that the entire Task Force will need to examine this issue. The TC Committee seems to be moving toward considerable additional density with accompanying population and traffic. We certainly question the Boston Properties request for a 5.0 FAR with the exception of its parcel immediately adjacent to the coming Metro station which likely deserves higher density especially if BP proffers to make sorely needed pedestrian-bicycle, grade-separated connections to the north and other needed improvements. Nonetheless, we note that the F.A.R. for the RTC urban core is only 2.0 and cannot understand why a F.A.R. near that level is inadequate in areas adjacent to the station. At some point, the Task Force will need to assess development in the entire Reston area. We suggest that the Committee make that job easier.

A. Urban Core:

[A conspicuous omission was the decision not to review the urban core.](#) This means there is no conceptual plan for the entire Town Center area. The TC urban core is now over 20 years old and was planned before Metro. Some buildings are low rise (two stories) and could become subject to redevelopment. Furthermore, the street grid needs to be integrated with the North Station and TCN areas. Until the hole in the donut is filled, the report will prove incomplete. We recommend the Committee fill the hole now.

B. North of the Station:

Considerable additional density is envisioned in the area with a major development in D-4/D-5. Some of the proposals being advanced by Boston Properties are visionary and are to be commended. Among the good ideas is a major urban plaza, a bridge to Metro and a pedestrian/bicycle throughway to the West.

However, the report equivocates on whether this development should include a major [performing arts center. To us, it is clear that this is the best site in Reston for such a signature center:](#)

- Adjacent to Metro
- Near garages and attractions in town Center
- Compatible with and a major asset to the overall Boston Properties proposal.

The Committee should strongly endorse this project—it is a major civic amenity that will not just “come about” and the size of the project is such that, unlike other civic facilities, it should be clearly demarcated in the plan. If Boston Properties is to be rewarded with a FAR of 5.0 and 350 feet of height, it seems reasonable in return that a site is designated, and Boston Properties and neighboring developers be asked to carry a share of construction costs.

A Children's Science Museum is another attractive idea and might be desirable, but seems more appropriate in the Wiehle station area with its education theme or at Herndon/Monroe with its access to the Wetlands.

C. South of the Station:

[This work is incomplete in the draft.](#) Although the Subcommittee wavered, we were pleased that the draft report calls for a "strong residential component" and active supporting retail. Density levels as high as a 5.0 FAR along the DTR and at the station and 3.5 further away have been discussed. [This kind of intensity, twice that of the urban core, does not seem justified and should be reduced in the final report.](#) Also, the grid of streets concept needs fleshing out as does discussion of critical bus service here.

[The central question of how to assure easy pedestrian access to Metro remains unanswered.](#) JBG seeks direct pedestrian connection from its Reston Heights property to the southeast, a concept worthy of support, but likely in need of private funding. [A citizen proposal to examine building a ped/bike overpass from Reston Heights in the south to Plaza America on the north side](#) was dismissed. It may be part of a larger connectivity solution for pedestrian and bikes, in this appropriately funded by the benefiting landowners presumably on either side of the toll road/rail. [We recommend the Committee rethink its stand on this proposed connection and endorse it.](#) Efforts to somehow incorporate the large USGS parcel south of Sunrise Valley will not prosper. The Feds have longer term consolidation plans for this land. More quality open space will have to be generated internally north of Sunrise Valley as a consequence.

7. Governance

In a two minute "discussion," the Committee decided, at the urging of the Co-Chair, that Town Center North be incorporated in the Reston Town Center Association. Given the potential bias in the Committee on this issue, a wiser course would have been to have a systematic discussion and to have invited the Reston Association to address the group and present the obvious alternative. Given the absence of some civic amenities in the Town Center and the division of the Reston community perpetuated by the RA-RTCA duo, an argument on behalf of RA would have been beneficial. [We strongly encourage the full Task Force to rectify this unfortunate process and hear the merits of both associations' abilities to best serve future residents of the area.](#)

8. Conclusion: Summary of Recommendations

1. Add safe, substantial and attractive pedestrian and bicycle links from the station area to Explorer Street, Library Street, and Fountain Drive on the east with all grade-separated crossings in addition to the Discovery Road connection. These must be in place when the station opens in late 2016 or early 2017.
2. Fund necessary road crossing infrastructure by commercial interests.
3. Request Task Force as a whole put together a list of at least the north-south road connections which are preconditions to the functioning of the new development in the station area and to the functioning of the community of Reston.

4. Include safe crossings for pedestrians and bicyclists as strong suggestions for Fairfax County funding in the Committee's final report.
5. Emphatically endorse the suggestions made by residents and developer JBG for a pedestrian and bicycle connection from Reston Heights to Plaza America. Here again, we believe this piece of infrastructure should be paid for by the businesses who stand to directly benefit from them.
6. Require a connector bus offering frequent shuttle service between the Metro station and Town Center North, including intervening urban core stops. Similarly, as development occurs south of the station, have the same service extended there. Add bus-only streets and lanes to this report.
7. Link the current bus terminal at Bluemont Way to the new one at Metro.
8. Develop a robust bus service probably as a joint effort of Fairfax County and the private sector, including both intra-Reston and inter-regional.
9. Adopt at least 2:1, residential to commercial ratio, in its final report, and request that the Task Force do the same.
10. Improve the FCPA 5-acre park on the eastern edge bordering Spectrum and take advantage of its sloping topography to become a cascades-type park with a water feature serving the new Spectrum retail and residential developments as well as TCN and all of Reston.
11. Endorse the planned town green or mall running north-south in the center of TCN and recommend that it be wide enough to accommodate modest recreational/athletic activities such as bocce, badminton and others appropriate to the town green concept.
12. Engage the County in a dialogue on its plans for future county services with committee and community participants.
13. Eliminate a fuel depot in the new TCN
14. Redesign or relocate the police station.
15. Specify open space plans as suggested by the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA).
16. Create green open spaces along the southern edge by Sunrise Valley Drive.
17. Consider putting the central park concept in the final report for the south.
18. Task Force will need to assess development in the entire Reston area.
19. Current TC needs to be also reassessed for redevelopment.
20. Performing arts center should be located near TC Metro.
21. A ped/bike overpass from Reston Heights in the south to Plaza America on the north side should be built.
22. Discussion of membership of new TC residents into a homeowners group should be opened to both RA and RTCA.

Cc: RMPSSSTF Chair-PNicoson
Vision Co-Chairs-JCarter/KWilliams
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DPZ-FSeldon/HMerkel/SSmith
RCA-MStillson
RCA/Reston 2020-JBowman, TPetrine, TMaynard
RA-KDMcKee/MMathews
ARCH: GVolley