

Reston Parkway Special Study Area

Executive Summary

The Committee believes that new development at or near the Reston Town Center Metro Station (and we think that should be the name for the station; it should reflect the signature destination that Town Center already is and will further become) represents an important opportunity upon which the community should be eager to capitalize. Given time constraints, the Committee gave greatest focus to those parcels closest to the Station: parcels D3, 4, and 5 north of the Toll Road (or what we refer to collectively as “TC Metro North”) and south of the Toll Road parcels E3, 4, and 5 and so much of E1 that is currently zoned I4 (or what we refer to collectively as “TC Metro South”).

TC Metro North should become an extension of the TC urban core – rich with nightlife, signature restaurants and retail, perhaps a hotel with convention capability, an augmented office presence, a strong residential component consistent with transit-oriented development (TOD), and at least one prominent civic use. In combination, these additions to the Town Center will make it a rich destination/origination station that will be a unique asset to Reston.

TC Metro South should fundamentally change from an essentially suburban office park to a more dynamic urban space – separate and different from Town Center (given the limited north-south crossings over the Toll Road) with its own identity. In addition to more urban office space, we envision a strong residential presence. Supporting retail, hotel, restaurant, and at least one grocer should also mark the space.

Both places should have strong interparcel connectivity and, where appropriate, a more urban grid. All roadways should be complete streets (capable of comfortably handling pedestrian, bicycle, transit-oriented, and vehicular travel). Distinctive and robust open spaces (consistent with the then-current and applicable County guidelines) are essential.

Amongst the three stations that are the subject of the Task Force’s consideration, this is the only one without planned parking. It is also the one we think will grow first (after the initial growth at Wiehle) and fastest and the community should be specially focused on making it a world-class success. Doing so will in our view be decidedly in the community’s best interests.

Vision

The Committee recommends that the TC Metro Station be viewed as a destination/origination station. This will be realized by ensuring that its immediate neighborhoods, both north and south, evolve to a more urban, mixed use character with compelling reasons for people to take the Metro to and from this place. The focus first and foremost should be on successfully extending the urban core south to the Metro station. Good things will follow from that.

Organizing Principles

We will discuss separately the individual components of Metro North and South. But the following four organizing principles apply to both:

- **An Urban (not suburban) Character with Interparcel Connectivity and/or Grid:** Metro North should continue to develop, and Metro South must develop, as an urban, mixed-use space. The I4 zoning designations for the Metro South parcels should be changed accordingly. A fundamental building block for both will be creating interparcel connectivity and, in certain cases, a grid of complete streets. In the case of Metro North, the connections must tie into the existing urban core (with at least ped/bike friendly connectors to Explorer and Library Streets and ultimately realization of the planned “Discovery Street”). For Metro South, that means creation of connections to the planned Kiss and Ride and strong north-south and east-west connectivity overall. For certain land units (particularly those in E4 and 5) an urban grid with typical urban-sized blocks would seem to make sense. Linking that grid in a way that also enhances east-west connectivity across Reston Parkway would be a plus.
- **1:1 (sq. ft.) Residential:Non-Residential:** The Task Force has heard that the best TOD in the Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor (that which creates a healthy mix of uses and best mitigates the traffic/congestion impacts) is essentially 1:1 sq. ft. residential:non-residential. Our research further suggests 1:1 as a “best practice” for successful TOD. We think that ratio, or something very close to it, is an appropriate target for new development on any lot within both Metro North and South. We note that Town Center as currently built is significantly weighted to commercial over residential. Residential development that any developer proposes above this target (so that Town Center overall can get closer to a 1:1 ratio) should be encouraged if not incented.
- **Robust and Diverse Open Space:** Open space is at a premium in Town Center. What we are recommending for Town Center North, if adopted, will help. But the residential and commercial populations will significantly grow if our recommendations for the TC Metro Station area are adopted. That will require a strong commitment to open space in both Metro North and South to ensure a high quality of life.
- **A Commitment to Distinctive Design:** Communities around the world look to Town Center as a model of planned development. All of its architecture should reflect this exalted status and embody the theme of Town Center’s ongoing 20th Anniversary celebration: distinctive and defining.

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To achieve these important outcomes our partners in the development community must be properly incented. Development within Metro North and South (and we emphasize we are talking only about those parcels closest to the TC Metro Station) that meets these four criteria – grid, green, balanced residential:non-residential, and distinctive design – should be allowed the flexibility to go as high as a [3.0 FAR? 4.0 FAR? 5.0 FAR?] with building heights up to [350 feet?]. Zoning should be amended accordingly.¹

Individual Components

The Committee heard interesting presentations about how Metro North and South might develop:

Metro North: The key to realizing a vision of an extended urban core will be, certainly initially, the development of D4. Ideas included a possible multi-level platform with parking below and mixed use above, which generated keen interest. There was talk of potentially bisecting the upper level of the platform with an east-west urban plaza with signature retail on either side. There might be some street parking along that plaza to allow for deliveries and short stops, but traffic would otherwise be funneled to the parking below and then out to Town Center Parkway.

Metro South: There were a number of ideas heard for Metro South as well, but these are even less advanced since this area has heretofore been unable to develop residential. There was, however, wide agreement on the concepts of a more urban, mixed use space and one that creates better interparcel connectivity. Where appropriate (e.g., in the E5 and perhaps E4 parcels) an urban grid of streets should be considered. In all events, strong east-west and north-south connectivity will be essential.

The attached straw man map is illustrative but not prescriptive of certain of these themes. How any of this evolves will be a matter between the developers and County with appropriate community input, as market conditions allow. We do see, however, the following individual components as important to whatever final plans develop.

- **Transportation Infrastructure**

- *Metro North:*

- *Interior and Interparcel Network of Streets/Connections:* A classic urban grid may not make sense in D4. There are a series of roads or connections, however, that the Committee feels should be incorporated into future development thinking:
 - The existing curb cut and traffic light along Sunset Hills should be utilized as a vehicular ingress/egress. This might

¹ Our recommendations for Metro North and South may or may not be appropriate for the extended Reston Parkway Special Study Area. The Committee suggests that those areas outside Metro North and South be given additional scrutiny in Phase II of the Committee's work.

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also become an east-west boulevard through the site potentially leading to parking below (if the platform idea is pursued). Indeed, keeping most parking away from the urban plaza that almost certainly will have to develop strikes us as essential.

- Potentially adding a second ingress/egress off Sunset Hills about one block to the west of the existing curb cut would allow for creation of a north-south spine for the site.
- The already proffered extension of “Discovery Street” should be completed once the development trigger is met.
- The Committee also feels there must be additional north-south connectivity to the existing urban core. Extending vehicular roadways presents serious logistical challenges. At a minimum, however, we think there must be ped/bike connectors that essentially extend Explorer and Library Streets into and connect with whatever street network is created for D4.
 - We say “essentially extend” because at least in the near term each may require a slight jog around existing structures (the Sallie Mae parking structure in the case of the Explorer extension and parking along the western edge of Discovery Square with respect to the Library Street extension).
 - In addition, we recognize that each will require an overpass over the W&OD Trail. Depressing the trail at the appropriate locations so these new crossings can be essentially at grade is an outcome the Committee feels deserves special consideration. The cooperation of the Northern Virginia Parks Authority will be needed to achieve these outcomes. We highlight these needs in this report so they may be given the priority we think they require.
 - Effective ped/bike crossings across Bluemont Way will also be required to make these connections work.
- In terms of interparcel connectivity, the Committee believes it may be desirable to provide a functioning east-west connection between D4 and D3 across Town Center Parkway (one that might allow access from the west to the D4 extension of the urban core).
- The Discovery Square and Overlook portions of these lots are not likely to redevelop in the near future. If and as they do the same principles apply – creating a network of connections that ties in with the existing and extended urban core and TC Metro Station.

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- Thinking about this extended urban core more broadly, future planning must accommodate better ped/bike crossings across the four major boulevards that frame or bisect the extended urban core: Reston Parkway, Bluemont Way, Town Center Parkway, and New Dominion Drive.
- *Bus Circulator:* The Committee *strongly* recommends a bus circulator or linear connector service from the TC Metro Station throughout the Town Center District and Town Center North. Timing for that service will depend on achieving a critical mass that justifies the expense, but at some point we see that as an essential priority to help minimize vehicular traffic in and through the Town Center District.
- *Metro South:*
 - *Interior and Interparcel Network of Streets/Connections:* The attached straw man represents some base line thinking about the kinds of connections we see as important throughout Metro South as it evolves from more of a suburban office park to an urban, mixed use space:
 - North-south and east-west spines are critical to the parcels' redevelopment. Edmund Halley should be extended to link with the Kiss and Ride (and, if it is ever built, the Town Center Parkway extension). An east-west spine should be built using the existing right in-right out off Reston Parkway into parcel E5. That should connect with Edmund Halley with consideration being given ultimately to extending it or a parallel road farther west (tying ultimately with South Lakes Drive).
 - A more urban grid linking E4 and E5 should also be pursued. Block size in E5 should approximate typical urban dimensions.
 - The existing ingress/egress points into E5 along Sunrise Valley Drive also present ready opportunities to create north-south roads to further develop the E5 grid.
 - The near- and even long-term expectation is that much of E2 will remain a Federal government campus for the USGS (if not others). We think extending Edmund Halley south into that lot would provide an efficient and more direct connection with the Metro station, thus helping to keep additional traffic off the main collector roads (assuming some kind of shuttle service to the Metro).
 - *Signalized Intersection on Reston Parkway:* JBG and Brookfield have urged that we recommend a signalized intersection at Reston

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Parkway utilizing the existing right in-right out into parcel E5. This would provide important east-west vehicular and ped/bike connectivity across Reston Parkway with parcel F1. Although the Committee has not heard from any transportation experts on the subject, both developers have researched the issue and feel strongly that addition of this intersection would help alleviate some of the congestion that occurs at the Reston Parkway/Sunrise Valley intersection (identified as one of the worst congestion points during peak periods in Fairfax County). We recognize this would create a signalized intersection closer to the Toll Road ramp than VDOT might ordinarily allow. We would urge that VDOT be open to this idea, however, as we think the benefits in providing important east-west connectivity and potentially mitigating existing traffic congestion at the Reston Parkway/Sunrise Valley intersection could be significant.

- *Other Transportation Infrastructure Improvements Applicable to both Metro North and South:*
 - *Complete Streets:* All streets within Metro North and South should reflect an emphasis on “complete streets” that will be designed to enable safe access and use for all users: pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders.
 - *Bicycle Facilities:* Bicycle lanes and facilities – that will enable residents and workers to travel by bicycle on dedicated on-road facilities and make use of bike racks, bike lockers, and other facilities at residential, retail, and commercial areas – should be a priority throughout Metro North and South. Bike sharing should also be given consideration (at least in Metro North).
 - *Pedestrian Connectivity from the Metro Station:* The pedestrian bridge and crossing over the Toll Road envisioned for the TC Metro Station must be accessible 24/7 (with the Metro access area capable of being separately locked off so it does not interfere with this 24/7 access). This will allow at least one important north-south pedestrian link between Metro North and South. Further, this connection must be extended directly into the D4 and E4 lots to allow those using the train a direct connection into the extended urban core to the north and the mixed use development to the south.
 - *Additional Pedestrian Access To/From the Eastern End:* JBG has asked that the Committee recommend an additional pedestrian connector from the eastern end of the station to Reston Parkway, ending with a crosswalk leading into the F1 lot. [TBD: Not everyone on the Committee is convinced of the public utility or practicality of such a connection and/or have concerns about traffic impacts of a pedestrian crossing at that location (especially given that we are urging consideration of a new signalized intersection

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essentially two blocks to the south to improve east-west connectivity across Reston Parkway). Nonetheless, if VDOT is comfortable with this connector and it is privately funded, the Committee does not object to its construction.]

- In addition to the transportation infrastructure improvements recommended here, the RMAG recommendations should be made part of the Comprehensive Plan and aggressively pursued in Town Center and Metro South.
- Traffic Analyses: Future development applications should include detailed traffic, bike, and pedestrian impact analyses that address the transportation impacts of, and possible mitigation measures for, the project.
 - Overall the goal should be to create a much more pedestrian and bicycle friendly experience through Metro North and South. Coupled with a bus circulator or linear connector in Metro North, and the interparcel network of connections we advocate, this will help ensure that the immediate TC Metro Station area becomes a more people- and less vehicular-oriented space.
- **Open Space**
 - Open Space as Centerpiece:
 - *Metro North*: A signature urban plaza as centerpiece of the D4 development makes good sense. This is the touchdown point in Metro North for those exiting the Metro and should evoke a special sense of place.
 - The plaza, however, cannot be the only open space on this lot (especially if D4 and D5 will ultimately be more tightly knitted together as would seem inevitable as the core grows).
 - One possible asset that the Committee identified is the storm water pond on the Discovery Square lot. Taking advantage of this space and creating a water-oriented open space would provide a different and very interesting type of open space within the core (perhaps analogous to the swan boat experience in Boston's Public Garden).
 - *Metro South*: Some kind of prominent square or park would seem to make sense for the South given the new emphasis on residential. Two ideas, both reflected on the straw man (again for illustrative purposes only), piqued some interest among the Committee:
 - One would be creating a central park utilizing space in E4 and 5. We know the County is in need of rectangular ball fields, but we don't think that purpose would be served here. If there is going to be increased density here to create healthy TOD then we don't think taking scarce TOD space for a rectangular field is appropriate. Other areas of Reston that will not grow to this kind of density should be looked

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to for additional ball fields (including, for example, roof space at the other two Metro stations which we would assume are not going to develop to the same kind of densities or building heights envisioned here).

- A second idea (and parts of the two could be combined) would be using the four storm water ponds along the southern edge of Metro South to create an interconnected series of parks. Our impulse is that the first of these ideas makes more sense, but the point is there are interesting options for prominent open space in Metro South.
- Finally, the forested area that is part of E2 affords different and interesting options for open space. The Committee feels that lines of communication should be opened with the Federal Government to explore preserving this area in some way. It may present the possibility of a win-win – augmenting open space in Metro South while still preserving some kind of natural buffer for the Federal property.
- *Additional Open Space in Both Areas:* In addition to a signature piece(s) of open space, both Metro North and South would benefit from the kinds of additional open space we identified as possibilities for TCN:
 - Traffic calming measures as open space features;
 - Green pedestrian pathways through blocks;
 - Buffers along individual land units within parcels as appropriate to the unit’s function/use; and.
 - Innovative uses of building rooftops for this purpose to increase both the amount and diversity of open space (admittedly perhaps a more difficult thing to accomplish with the kind of building heights that may be necessary here to achieve the development goals we have set out).
- *Public Art:* The incorporation of public art, especially in an urban plaza or central park, as well as at other major public spaces, should be considered in any future development plan for these areas.
- **Civic Uses/Facilities**
 - *Metro North:* The Committee feels there must be space dedicated to a significant civic use that will add to D4/D5’s potential of creating this as a true destination station.
 - There has been some preliminary discussion of a possible world-class performing arts center. Another possibility that some on the Committee find especially interesting is a children’s science center (there is not one now in Northern Virginia, and having that within walking distance from the Metro station would seem inherently desirable given the demographic it would serve).

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- The Committee is in no position to define what would best meet the goal of creating a destination station and satisfy community need; that should be defined through a collaborative community-County process. But we mention the examples above as illustrative of the kind of significant scale we think is needed for the civic component here.
 - *Metro South:* A similar kind of facility on the south side of the Toll Road, within walking distance of the Metro Station, might well help in developing the new identity for Metro South. We don't see this as an area that will have a heavy civic presence, but a signature public facility might help draw attention and visitors.
- **Intensity/Density of Development**
 - *Residential:Non-residential Intensity:* GMU reports that the current jobs:household ratio in the Reston Parkway Special Study Area is approximately 15:1. This roughly converts to a 4:1 sq. ft. ratio (non-residential:residential). Our sense is the best research suggests that something close to a 1:1 sq. ft. ratio maximizes the chances for successful TOD – creating a rich mix of uses that will mitigate traffic impacts. The Committee feels that going forward new development in Metro North must be guided by this 1:1 target.
 - *Planning Mechanism:* The Committee proposes that any Metro North or South property that is the subject of a zoning application to achieve higher FARs than are currently allowed must meet the four organizing principles identified above, including being balanced at least [.4:.6] [1:1] sq. ft. residential:non-residential (it could be more heavily residential if the developer feels the market will bear it, but it must be at least equal to this target ratio).
 - The zoning application may be that of one or any number of landowners acting jointly or collaboratively within Metro North, Metro South, or some combination from both. In either case (a single or joint application) it is our view that the organizing principles identified in this report must be satisfied for the property that is the subject of the application.
 - In addition, the residential and non-residential development that is the subject of an approved application need not be built at the same time. By including residential in the approved plans this will essentially create a “land bank” that will ensure the residential development gets built once the market allows (if that is not simultaneous with the non-residential components).
 - Further, [Consider further incentives for residential, or perhaps to encourage more above the target ratio: e.g., relief from parking requirement and let market decide?; allowing some number of units above the target to be free of the workforce housing requirement?; other ideas?]

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- *FAR and Building Heights:* Any Metro North or South zoning application that meets the above criteria (and any other applicable County requirements) should be entitled to a FAR of up to [3.0? 4.0? 6.0?] and a building height not to exceed [350'? More?]. Such developments will be consistent with what we view as sound TOD and urban design and should be incented accordingly.
 - [Placeholder for discussion: Another way to build in incentives would be to tier – allow up to say 3.0 if you hit the target and something higher if you do better than the target ratio; this may create unintended consequences – there may come a time when we don't want to encourage so much residential; leaving it simply at the target ratio with no gimmick for more lets the market control and so long as we are comfortable with the target ratio the market can define if more is desired].
 - [Should we say something about variegated building heights as we did for TCN?]²

² We have talked very little about parcels F1 and 2, both of which are within the ½ mile radius of the TC Metro Station. F2 of course was only recently developed, and there is a pending APR nomination for F1. We are reluctant to say without further study that F1 should be subject to the same criteria and benefits we have outlined for Metro North and South. We note, however, that JBG reported to us that its pending APR for F1 is 1.18:1 residential:non-residential and a mix of uses is proposed. If the nomination also meets the criteria for open space and distinctive architectural design then it may satisfy the organizing principles set forth in this report. (Worth noting also is that F2 has been built out at 1.34:1 residential:non-residential, excluding the hotel space.) We think these parcels should be revisited along with the other parcels that are part of the Reston Parkway Special Study Area for which we have not given guidance. [Will that prejudice JBG? If so, do we want to integrate F1 into this report somehow?]