

September 25, 2014

Mr. Richard Lambert
Department of Planning & Zoning
Fairfax County

Dear Mr. Lambert,

This letter and the attached edited version of the September 5, 2014, strawman Phase 2 Reston Master Plan comprise RCA Reston 2020's comment on the strawman and thoughts for its improvement. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to contribute our thoughts to help you and DPZ improve an already very good plan for the future of Reston's suburban neighborhoods. We hope our comments here and in the attached draft will help make it an even better plan for Reston. In this letter, we strive to highlight the key issues and themes that should be addressed in your revisions. The edited draft provides specific language changes in keeping with those issues and themes.

Scope of comments. With a couple of exceptions, our comments here are confined to the new language (black text) in the draft plan excluding the draft language on the Village Centers. Clearly, the Village Center language is currently incomplete and we will wait until after a full draft is available and we have had the mid-October community meeting to discuss our thoughts on new plan language.¹ In the meantime, we believe our thoughts shared with DPZ in "[Ideas for Development of the Phase 2 Reston Master Plan,](#)" July 11, 2014, continue to provide an adequate vision of our expectations for the redevelopment of the village centers whether or not their landowners are so inclined at present.

These are only our initial comments on the new draft text. We expect to provide more comments as the draft language moves forward. We intend to comment on the new village center language as well as the existing language ("gray text") when the full plan draft is assembled and my comment further on the new text here ("black text") as well. We suspect additional changes will be warranted.

Identifying "minor" changes. Although we have generally not commented on the old language (gray text) in the strawman this time, we know that so-called "minor" changes have been made in this language and we believe that some of those changes are, in fact, major. We reserve the right to comment on those proposed changes when they are disclosed.

In particular, we understand that language in the plan regarding the TSAs has been taken out that restricts some activities to the TSAs. For example, the phrase "in the transit station area" has been dropped from the sentence noting that a new Reston Regional Library may be built. The omission suggests that the library could be built anywhere in Reston and that is not satisfactory. The Reston Task

¹ We have suggested in two places that the affordable senior housing in Village Centers should be sustained, expanded, and/or enhanced and that any redevelopment be of "universal design." Seniors easy access to the retail and other opportunities at Village Centers is imperative and should be strengthened. They are a growing share of our growing population.

Force took more than four years to develop that language which was approved by the Board of Supervisors seven months ago. It was there for a reason, specifically because of the central Reston location in North Town Center and the availability of County land (including the land on which the current library is built).

This is not the time to substantively amend the Phase 1 master plan unless the County wants to open a discussion about the plan in its entirety. The ink is barely dry on the document and its development was highly contentious. *Moreover, in future presentations of the draft Reston plan, we urgently request that you identify any and all changes you make in the plan document, including deletions, no matter how “minor” DPZ may think they are. We think the community has a right to understand ALL proposed language changes.*

Waffling language. Our key substantive concern about this draft plan, as we have seen in drafts for the Phase 1 master plan, is all the openings provided in the text for diversion from the alleged key theme of a particular portion of draft plan. These qualifications, limitations, ambiguities, exceptions, etc., weaken the thrust of the text and undermine community confidence that the County intends to pursue the principal theme it describes, whatever that may be.

Let us cite just one blatant example from p. 48 discussing single-family home redevelopment. Among the conditions to be met in redevelopment is this one:

Maintain, at a minimum, the existing amount of natural areas, except for minor encroachments.

This sentence sets a “minimum” standard, and then proceeds to undermine it by identifying an exception for “minor encroachments” without quantifying what “minor” is. Which is it? Lawyers and developers love this language, but it provides no reassurance whatsoever for the community that Reston’s planning principles calling for the protection and enhancement of natural areas (#2 and #9) will be supported. We have made a number of edits throughout the draft, but probably not enough, to address these many language loopholes.

We strongly encourage you to tighten this and similar highly ambiguous and contradictory language throughout the draft master plan consistent with the principal thrust of the language. Moreover, wherever possible, we believe it is important to quantify the exceptions that you believe are necessary. Otherwise, the plan is not very meaningful in providing guidance.

“Urban” design language and similar characterizations. The phrase “urban design” or similar references to “urban” are used throughout the draft plan when talking about the community as a whole, the TSAs, and even the Phase 2 residential areas. Moreover, in different places, the design and other characteristics of Reston are characterized as community, urban, or suburban. This is confusing to the reader and creates an opportunity for expansive interpretation of suburban Reston as “urban” in nature.

We believe these characterizations of design and other similar language need to be consistently applied throughout the plan as follows:

- References to Reston as a whole should be characterized as “**community design**,” not urban. After all, Reston as a whole is a planned community and includes a variety of development forms, urban and suburban.
- The Phase 1 TSAs should be characterized as “**urban design**” as the Reston Task Force, DPZ, and the Board tried to achieve.
- The Phase 2 neighborhood areas should be characterized as “**suburban design**” only.
- In at least one place, the draft characterizes the village centers as “**village center urban design**.” In general, this represents a much less dense mixed use development than found in Reston’s urban areas, but its mixed use is urban in character. You may want to specify this as a definition. We are comfortable with the characterization and believe it should be applied throughout when talking about the village centers.

The continued inconsistent use of these adjectives may lead some to believe that Reston’s residential areas are in some way “urban.” They are not nor do we believe that DPZ believes they will be in the future. We believe our suggestions above resolve that situation.

Connectivity and transportation. We are enthusiastic about improved connectivity in Reston, especially for pedestrians and bicyclists, *but not at the expense of vehicular traffic.* Automobiles will remain the predominant mode of transportation in Reston, especially in its suburban areas, and even the plans for expanded bus service will mean the greater use of Reston’s roadways. Moreover, the planned addition of some 50,000 people to the TSAs and the potential addition of several thousand new residents to the village centers means there will be more vehicular traffic.

We would put special emphasis on key north-south roadways that, in our view, received short shrift in the Phase 1 effort. Much of the traffic generated in Reston, including some commuting traffic, involves people moving from the north to south or vice versa suburban (Phase 2) areas of our community. In particular, as part of the proffer process, we would ask again that Reston Parkway (including the corridor overpass) be expanded to three through lanes all the way north to Baron Cameron Avenue and south to Glade, about one-mile from the Town Center Metro station in each direction, to facilitate the movement of traffic to, from, and **through** the Town Center TSA. The standing County approvals for the 23-story Town Center Office Building and the 10-12-story mixed-use Spectrum Center, both outside the ½-mile walkability circle, highlight the relatively urgent need for the road’s expansion north of the corridor. The choking of suburban traffic will only hurt the development of both the TSA and suburban Reston.

In addition to ensuring that connectivity does not come at the expense of vehicular traffic, we have proposed stronger language to help ensure that any traffic impacts caused by redevelopment are mitigated by developers. *The plan must at least sustain the existing level of service (LOS) for Restonians in the Phase 2 study area, including accommodations for TSA residents to drive in the suburban areas of Reston to a school, park, preferred supermarket or other retail outlet, and even their place of work in or beyond suburban Reston.* We have made some adjustments in the language throughout the draft plan, but others may be required.

Essential public infrastructure. Beyond transportation, redevelopment in the Phase 2 area, especially any mixed-use redevelopment of the village centers (such as Lake Anne, which will add more than 1,000 residents) will place an additional burden on public facilities, including schools, parks, public safety, and other public infrastructure. This appears to be a major weakness in the draft language. *We can find no concrete proposals in the draft plan about what will be done to meet these additional needs. This needs to be addressed in the plan as a County responsibility.*

Reston tax gains to serve Reston first. We believe language needs to be inserted into the general **Implementation** portion of this Reston Master Plan that calls for Tax Increment Financing in Reston to help assure that the added tax value created by Reston’s development and redevelopment provide the needed local infrastructure to support the new development first before any use is put toward its application elsewhere. It may well be that the entirety of such a fund is not needed exclusively to meet Reston’s needs, but Reston’s public infrastructure needs would take highest priority in such a fund. Any balance remaining after those needs are met could be returned to the County’s general coffers.

The late David Edwards, a career community planner and Reston resident, had a slightly different approach this need for funds to develop Reston’s public infrastructure. He described it this way in a 2010 working paper for Reston 2020’s Transportation Sub-committee as follow:

Reston Infrastructure Improvement Escrow Fund

*In order to begin the process that will allow Fairfax County to implement a series of future capital projects that will greatly enhance long-term property values throughout Reston over and above those periodically programmed by Fairfax County and the Commonwealth of Virginia, all future development or redevelopment projects must, at the time of rezoning or required site plan amendment, make a one-time contribution (proffer) of a fair and equitable monetary amount to a **Reston Infrastructure Improvement Escrow Fund**. This proffered amount may be in addition to other proffered items deemed essential to the specific project. This fund, to be utilized only throughout the Reston Plan area, must be established by Fairfax County to assure the collective long-term ability of Reston-focused entities to fund a wide variety of important future Reston infrastructure improvements. . . .*

Since Reston has always been a generator of a revenue surplus for Fairfax County due to its vibrant commercial and residential tax base, and the fact that it covers services and facilities internally, many of the costs of which would traditionally fall to Fairfax County general funds, it is appropriate for Fairfax County to treat Reston a bit differently from conventional County subdivisions. Thus, a tax increment funding approach represents a reasonable re-investment back into a profitable County profit center so as to continue its future economic growth.

Stabilizing redeveloped apartment rents. We believe there is a serious risk that redeveloped apartments will price former tenants and others like them out of the market, undercutting Reston's vision of providing housing for all incomes and ages. We would like to suggest that language be included in the new plan that limits that possibility for at least awhile. We would suggest language along the following line near the beginning of the section “Guidelines for Multifamily Redevelopment:”

In addition to providing affordable and workforce housing consistent with County requirements, rents in re-developed apartments may not exceed the average of the rents for a unit type (characterized by the number of bedrooms) for the five years before prior to their demolition, plus ten percent. Moreover, the rents for these redeveloped apartments may not escalate by more than the rate of inflation (CPI-U-RS) for the first five years after they are leased.

One adverse unintentional consequence such language might generate is the conversion of apartments to condominiums and we hope you can assist in addressing that problem. Moreover, we appreciate that Virginia law may not permit this specific language, but look to DPZ to try to develop language that would allow Reston to sustain its housing diversity by limiting rent increases caused by redevelopment.

RA Deed. Virtually the entirety of the area covered in this Phase 2 draft plan is covered by the Reston Association (RA) deed, yet nowhere is adherence with the deed and RA processes mentioned. While there are references to RA's activities and roles throughout the text, *we believe it is important to reinforce those statements with a broad-based statement acknowledging the Reston deed and RA's role in guiding development and redevelopment in the opening paragraph(s) of the three sections on Reston's neighborhoods, village centers, and other commercial areas.*

In closing, we appreciate first and foremost the opportunity to comment and collaborate with DPZ on the development of the language in Phase 2 of the Reston Master Plan effort. We hope that you find our comments useful in addressing the needs of Reston's residents in future drafts. We regret that the editing of the attached draft text, which is highlighted, is not as clearly presented as we had hoped, but we believe you will be able to understand what we were trying to accomplish. If not, please feel free to contact us for clarification. And thank you for your contribution to the future of Reston.

On behalf of the RCA Reston 2020 Committee,

Terry Maynard, Co-Chairman
703-476-5376

PS: We strongly encourage you to also take a look at [a recap of the Community Meeting as prepared by the RCA Board of directors](#) on its blog. It has a number of important observations and suggestions for the draft plan that you may also wish to consider.

CC:

Supervisor Cathy Hudgins, Hunter Mill District
RCA Board of Directors
RCA Reston 2020 Committee
Cate Fulkerson, CEO, RA
Gerry Volloy, President, ARCH
Fred Selden, Chief, DPZ