

1994 Tysons Corner Plan's Issues and Objectives

PLANNING ISSUES: OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

From the 1960s through the 1990s, planning issues focused on establishing Tysons Corner as the "downtown" of Fairfax County. An all-encompassing issue has been how to encourage the area's economic growth while balancing and shaping this economic success within the context of the area's transportation capacity and the protection of adjacent residential neighborhoods. Both the area's access and the adjacent residential areas have provided resources which significantly contribute to Tysons Corner's economic success. Both continue to be important factors in shaping the area's future. Three other planning themes have been to plan for the eventual redevelopment of some existing uses; to encourage mixed-use developments, including more residential development; and to create a distinct identity for Tysons Corner through improved urban design.

Transportation Capacity and Development Potential

One of the major attractions of Tysons Corner is the excellent accessibility to the Washington Metropolitan region afforded by its location adjacent to the Capital Beltway, Dulles Airport Access and Toll Roads, Route 7 and Route 123. However, these highways are primarily intended to provide for through traffic and not access to individual properties. The amount of commercial development in Tysons Corner combined with through traffic along these roadways has resulted in traffic congestion during peak periods of travel. The congestion occurs during the traditional morning and evening rush hours, during the lunch hour and during peak retailing periods. This transportation level of service deterioration also leads to a corresponding reduction in the regional accessibility of the area.

Existing zoning (in 1993) would potentially allow approximately 18 million square feet of additional office and commercial development in Tysons Corner. To accommodate the amount of traffic likely to be generated by this level of development, the planned transportation system would need to be fully implemented. This would include providing for 18 additional lanes of roadway capacity, and rail service in the Dulles Access Road Corridor along the periphery of Tysons Corner. To accommodate higher levels of development (significantly above the current zoning), not only would the planned roadway system have to be implemented, but rail transit service serving the core area of Tysons and other transit enhancements would need to be provided. Transportation demand management programs which include carpools, vanpools and other employer-based measures, should be expanded to accommodate development within an acceptable transportation level of service as part of an overall transportation plan.

Planning for Redevelopment of Existing Uses

Within Tysons Corner, there is relatively little vacant land and much of this has already been approved for high-intensity office development. However, opportunities exist for the long-term redevelopment of existing, low intensity uses where a greater economic return can be achieved. Such uses include the auto dealerships, some retail centers along Route 7 and business service and storage uses along Tyco Road. Many of these sites already have the potential to redevelop to higher intensity use under the existing zoning. This has not occurred because the uses remain economically viable. In planning for the long-term future of Tysons Corner, methods should be found to retain these uses even if their physical surroundings change. For instance, auto showrooms and other retail and service uses could be incorporated within the ground floors of higher intensity mixed-use complexes.

Residential and Mixed-use Development

One of the principal goals outlined in the Policy Plan is to expand housing opportunities in or near employment centers, as a way to minimize the impacts of commuters on the road system and to make use of public transit more feasible as a transportation alternative. Specifically, additional residential development would result in fewer peak-hour trips than non-residential use and could result in more people walking to and from work and shopping. Planning for a mixture of residential and non-residential uses in the County's employment centers should also aid in expanding the opportunity for affordable housing and higher density residential development in areas that can be served by transit, and that can offer convenient access to retail and other services. In each of the Suburban Centers identified on the County's Concept for Future Development Map, residential uses have been planned where there have been opportunities for residential or mixed-use development as evidenced by vacant land or through redevelopment opportunities.

The Tysons Corner area contained approximately 5,700 housing units in a variety of housing types in 1993. Existing zoning (in 1993) would allow about 700 additional housing units. In planning for additional residential uses in Tysons Corner, the greatest opportunities are to include higher intensity residential developments within mixed-use projects and areas. In the Policy Plan, a mixed-use area is defined as a specified area which includes three or more different types of uses within its boundaries with these uses on separate but interrelated sites. A mixed-use project includes two or more physically integrated uses on one site or within one structure. When the term mixed-use development is used in this Plan, it is intended to encompass both mixed-use area and mixed-use project.

Mixed-use development which includes a housing component should create a quality living environment in areas that will primarily be developed as non-residential uses. Incorporating recreational and other amenities on-site and adequately protecting residential development from noise, light and other nuisances generated by commercial uses will aid in creating a quality living environment. In Tysons Corner, additional residential development would also help reduce traffic congestion and create a more pedestrian-oriented, day and evening activity center.

Protecting Existing Low Density Residential Areas

Given the scale and amount of existing and future development in the Tysons Corner Urban Center, it is important that this development not negatively impact the surrounding residential communities. Most of the residential communities adjacent to Tysons Corner are low density and comprised primarily of single-family detached homes. In most cases, these communities are effectively separated from Tysons Corner by transitional uses, such as low-rise office buildings, physical barriers such as roadways, and environmental features such as stream valleys, public parkland, and conservation easements. It is important that adequate screening, buffering and other design measures be incorporated into new development to mitigate any adverse impacts, and to maintain an "edge" to define the limits of the Tysons Corner Urban Center.

Urban Design

Tysons Corner, like a traditional downtown, contains many relatively tall buildings. However, buildings in Tysons Corner are not located side-by-side along streets and sidewalks but are generally designed as separate self-contained sites, set well back from roadways in campus-like settings and surrounded by large areas of surface parking.

Because the "edges" of Tysons Corner are generally well-established, it is clear where Tysons Corner "begins" as one approaches. However, in driving through Tysons Corner, there are few landmarks to give definition to its interacting uses. The overall effect is the lack of a "sense of place".

The pattern of relatively tall buildings separated by large expanses of parking lots and some open space and the dispersion of uses - a restaurant here, an office building a fair distance away- forces people to get into their cars to travel even short distances. Walking is difficult because there is no integrated system of sidewalks or trails between individual buildings or complexes. Such a land use pattern is also difficult to serve by transit because places where people can be picked up or dropped off are spread out. This pattern makes it difficult to operate an efficient or convenient transit system which, in turn, discourages ridership.

The tendency of people to walk between two locations is dependent on necessity, safety, weather or climate, time availability, proximity and the interesting character of the route. People will walk reasonable distances if the route is attractive and safe. Although attractive pedestrian-oriented places are found in parts of Tysons Corner, in general there is a lack of public amenities and usable open space. Similarly, in order for transit to be a desirable alternative, it must be safe, clean, and run regularly, often and predictably. Efficient operation requires that the number of stops be limited and that a relatively large number of people be picked up or dropped off at each stop. In order for Tysons Corner to evolve toward a more pedestrian and transit-oriented place in specified areas, future buildings will need to be better integrated with the surrounding area through the placement of buildings closer together and closer to the roads. Pedestrian facilities are needed which create a comprehensive pedestrian and open space system with urban open space features, such as plazas, courtyards and mini-parks.

CONCEPT FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT: VISION FOR THE URBAN CENTER

Over the next 20 to 30 years, Tysons Corner is envisioned to evolve into a more urban environment, while retaining the best features of a suburban activity center. On one hand, the Tysons Corner area should continue to combine all the kinds of businesses and activities that create an exciting and attractive city with activity beyond daytime business hours. Many of these businesses and housing units will be in high rise buildings, but these buildings will be sited closer together to be better served by pedestrian facilities and transit. The highest development intensities and the most "urban" areas of Tysons Corner will be located within designated core areas and within walking distance of future rail stations. On the other hand, Tysons Corner should preserve those highly valued suburban features such as usable open space and a scale of development appropriate to serve as a good neighbor to adjacent single-family residential areas.

Tysons Corner is envisioned to contain more housing within walking distance of jobs; circulation systems that are not auto-dependent; and a wide variety of community level retail and service uses that meet the daily needs of workers and residents alike. While the automobile will remain the major transportation mode serving Tysons Corner, more workers and residents in Tysons Corner will have the opportunity to get to their destinations by walking, by rail, or by riding on a shuttle bus system or "people mover" circulation system. More future commuters and visitors to Tysons Corner will be able to leave their cars at home and travel by rapid rail transit and local circulation systems. More people will arrive in carpools or vanpools, or work flexible hours to avoid the rush hour traffic. Workers and residents in Tysons Corner will be able to do everyday errands,

or meet a friend for dinner and a movie, without getting into an auto. Shoppers will be able to go to both regional malls safely and easily, without moving their cars from one parking structure to the other. Out-of-town visitors will be able to take rapid rail from Dulles International or National Airport to Tysons Corner, stay in a hotel, and attend a convention in a trade center: they should be able to take clients to dinner or relax at the local health club, all without renting a car. The Tysons Corner of the future should function efficiently without exclusive reliance on the auto to reach home, shops, work and recreation.

Extensive streetscaping with tree-lined sidewalks connecting buildings, will make walking safe and pleasant. Urban parks and plazas will be enhanced for year-round visual enjoyment with landscaping, works of art, benches and fountains. Opportunities for recreation will be created throughout the Urban Center. Recreation might take the form of an after-work game of basketball on a court on top of a parking structure; or it might be a lunch-hour jog on a trail up Old Courthouse Branch Stream Valley Park; or a brown-bag lunch in a plaza. Overall, Tysons Corner should incorporate some of the best features of the urban environment in terms of its efficiency and vitality, while retaining some of the suburban character that befits its function and location as one of this nation's premier suburban centers.

Major Objectives for Tysons Corner

The following major objectives for the Tysons Corner Urban Center provide a general framework to achieve the Goals for Fairfax County and to pursue this future vision. The following objectives are all important and are not prioritized:

1. Preserve and enhance Tysons Corner as a vital employment, retail and general business center serving the metropolitan Washington region and beyond.
2. Create an improved sense of place and function to promote the market success of the area, recognizing that meeting the present and future functional needs of commercial, employment and residential uses is important to protect and enhance existing economic activities and to provide for future high-quality development.
3. Preserve and protect existing stable residential neighborhoods adjacent to the boundaries of Tysons Corner.
4. Create centralized areas of relatively more intense development (core areas) for large-scale development, and less intense non-core areas that provide a transition to neighborhoods outside Tysons Corner's boundaries.
5. Encourage development of additional housing, including affordable units, in Tysons Corner so that employees may live near their workplaces, thus reducing the number and length of commuter auto trips.
6. Encourage mixed-use development that permits a combination of uses for market synergy. Such development should include pedestrian and auto circulation systems which integrate the development both internally and externally, resulting in high-quality design for a transit- and pedestrian-friendly environment.
7. Encourage development to achieve a more urban form through appropriate building heights, setbacks, building bulk and site design.

8. Develop a cohesive pedestrian circulation system linked to open spaces such as plazas, courtyards, greenways and parkland, in order to facilitate walking and reduce reliance on private automobiles.
9. Develop mass transit options, transportation strategies and planned highway improvements to mitigate traffic impacts in Tysons Corner and in adjacent residential neighborhoods.
10. Encourage improvement of environmental management regarding air and water quality.
11. Protect the remaining environmentally sensitive areas by preserving them as private or public open space.
12. Implement mechanisms that are necessary to carry out the intent of the Tysons Corner Plan, to ensure that its vision can become reality.

The attainment of the above objectives for the Urban Center, as well as the general and specific land use recommendations presented in this Plan, will assist in accommodating projected growth in employment and population while reducing dependence on the private automobile for local travel. This will be facilitated by encouraging a more urban form through such techniques as reducing minimum building setbacks; increasing allowable densities both for residential and non-residential uses; and linking those uses to serve both pedestrians and transit users. The net effect is to create a positive visual image, while simultaneously creating the concentration of employment and population needed to enhance transit usage.