

August 17, 2007

Tysons Corner Special Study
Fairfax County Department of Planning & Zoning
12056 Government Center Parkway, Suite 730
Fairfax, Virginia 22035-5505

Attention: Clark Tyler

Dear Clark:

The Vienna Town Council and I thank you for the July 17 briefing by you and representatives of the Tysons Land Use Task Force. We know the Task Force has a busy schedule, and we appreciate your taking the time to talk to us about the impact of Tysons re-development on traffic conditions, a topic very important to Vienna. We hope you agree that the meeting offered a good exchange of information, particularly on our concerns that the traffic analysis available at the July public outreach meetings did not consider the impact of re-development on traffic traveling on Maple Avenue/Route 123 through Vienna.

While we were able to cover a number of topics in our meeting, time did not permit discussion of all of our concerns. Some additional items are outlined below. We know the Task Force will be addressing these issues in the coming weeks, and the Council wanted to provide input to your deliberations.

- **Traffic Congestion.** In addition to the issue of traffic congestion on Maple Avenue/Route 123, the Council is very concerned about the dramatic increase in traffic Congestion in and around Tysons that would result from re-development at the density levels presented in the three test scenarios, particularly in the "pushing the envelope" scenario. While most of the public's attention has understandably focused on increases in peak hour traffic and congestion, we are alarmed that the traffic analysis also shows that non-peak congestion would increase significantly. Congested traffic during peak hours is difficult enough, but a re-development plan that would result in significant traffic congestion throughout the day would be a disservice to all concerned, whether they are residents, employees, visitors, or commuters.
- **Grid of Streets.** We agree that a street grid is an essential component in making the vision of Tysons work. However, we are concerned that getting from a vision to a built-out street grid may be very difficult due to financial and logistical considerations. In particular, acquisition of the necessary land will require either a significant investment to buy the needed property or density bonuses to encourage developers to proffer the land. The Task Force recommendations to the Board of Supervisors should clearly spell out a plan to implement a street grid, including the estimated total cost and the share to be borne by taxpayers. The possible use of eminent domain and the need for enabling legislation should be addressed in the recommendations. Ultimately, the street grid is so important that approval of re-development must be tied to the acquisition of rights-of-way and the availability of construction funding.

- Tysons infrastructure. A recent press article described a Task Force discussion of infrastructure improvements – schools, libraries, wastewater treatment, etc. – needed to support re-development. These requirements are significant for the density levels in all the test scenarios, but particularly for the “pushing the envelope” scenario. The Task Force report to the Board of Supervisors should provide cost estimates (including taxpayer share) for the infrastructure requirements and an implementation plan, including how to tie re-development efforts to the availability of the required infrastructure.

While all of the infrastructure requirements are important and have their own set of issues, I would note a particular concern of the Council: increased school capacity should come as high quality brick and mortar improvements, not interim or stop-gap measures that rely extensively on modular facilities at existing schools.

- Transportation Demand Management (TDM). The Council strongly supports a Tysons-wide TDM program that would partially mitigate some of the increased traffic resulting from re-development. The program should include mandatory participation by owners and developers in those TDM techniques considered necessary for the success of a Tysons-wide plan. An effective TDM program must also include monitoring and enforcement. A *Washington Post* article identified deficiencies in the County’s TDM Program, and failure by developers to meet agreed-to traffic mitigation targets. The *Post* article stated that the County is taking action to address these deficiencies, having hired a TDM Coordinator and commissioned a TDM strategy study. These and other actions That may be underway are laudable. We encourage the Task Force to take a strong stand in its recommendations on TDM by identifying specifics regarding the necessary organization, staff, and authorities required to ensure successful implementation of a Tysons TDM program, which is essential to Tysons’ future success. In addition, we have the following specific recommendation: *The Tysons TDM program should include an annual public report, published on the County’s Web site, that compares developers’ performance against agreed-to traffic Mitigation targets.*
- “Being a Good Neighbor.” We strongly endorse the Task Force’s guiding principle to protect communities bordering the Tysons planning area by providing densities and heights which are appropriate at the edge and which transition from areas of more density. Also, Being a Good Neighbor was one of the five key measures for evaluating the test scenarios. We are very pleased that the outreach meetings showed strong support for these principles. However, the Council notes the lack of questions on the survey directly addressing traffic congestion, which is a critical good neighbor test. We hope the next scenarios will clearly indicate a continuing commitment to the guiding principles and the concept of being a good neighbor, including control of traffic congestion and a balancing of the competing objectives of “connectivity” and controlling residential cut-through traffic.

- **Test Scenarios.** Perhaps most disappointing about our limited time was that we didn't have a chance to address the three scenarios at the core of the public outreach meetings. And while you may have already heard this from other quarters, I and other Council Members have heard from several participants who were frustrated that the survey questions did not allow them to address fully their concerns about density levels, traffic congestion, and the cost to the taxpayer from the re-development of Tysons. The ambiguity and/or possible multiple interpretations of several questions added to their frustration.

We appreciate that the Task Force's intended purpose for the meetings was not to have the public "vote" on the three scenarios, but rather to gather information for the refinement of future alternatives. We would, nonetheless, like to pass on some specific comments about the scenarios. Based on the traffic analysis, the "housing emphasis" scenario would result in the lowest level of traffic increase and traffic congestion. While we are not supporting a specific density level at this time, the Council believes the mix and location of development in the housing test scenario deserves strong consideration in developing future alternatives. Conversely, the "pushing the envelope" scenario resulted in what the Council considers to be unacceptably high traffic congestion and infrastructure requirements. It also seems to be unlikely to satisfy the good neighbor planning principle.

Lastly, the likelihood of Route 7 being a "Great Street" seems remote. Too many factors – too many traffic lanes, too much traffic, Metro running down the median, and the need to maintain Route 7 as a major commuter route through, not just to, Tysons – are working against it. The concept of parallel main streets in the pushing the envelope scenario would seem much more workable.

- **Transit Connections.** The Council believes that supporting transit services to and from Tysons, as well as within the core, are essential for Tysons to function effectively. The recent McLean Citizen's Association resolution on this issue sets out a well-considered case and we agree with the MCA's statements.

Clark, thank you again for your time and commitment to this process. We always welcome the chance to share information and ideas on Tysons' future course, knowing that the stakes for all of us in the area are very, very high. We look forward to future opportunities to meet with you and the Task Force.

Sincerely yours,



M. Jane Seeman
Mayor

CC: The Honorable Gerald Connolly, Chairman, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
The Town Council, the Town of Vienna
The Honorable Catherine Hudgins, Supervisor, Hunter Mill District
The Honorable Linda Smyth, Supervisor, Providence District