

Tysons Land Use Task Force Final Report

Executive Summary

Working Draft, July 14, 2008

This final report of the Tysons Land Use Task Force presents a long-term community vision for the future of Tysons Corner and a detailed plan for its successful implementation. The planned extension of Metrorail to and through Tysons Corner presents the last and best opportunity to get it right – namely, the future development and transformation of Tysons into a livable, walkable, enjoyable urban area. The Tysons Land Use Task Force believes that if an achievable, performance-based plan can be implemented over time, this positive future will be achieved for those working and living in Tysons Corner, while providing clear benefits for the entire County and protecting the quality of life for surrounding communities.

The Challenge: Overcoming Decades of Auto-Oriented Development

Over the past 40 years, Tysons Corner has grown from a simple country crossroads to the nation's 12th largest employment center and one of the country's largest retail centers, all without any major transit support. Tysons Corner is built for the car. With 167,000 parking spaces covering 40 million square feet, it has more real estate devoted to cars than people, and more parking spaces than its 17,000 residents and 110,000 workers combined. Its large superblocks and campus-style development are accompanied by widely separated buildings, few useful pedestrian pathways, and highly congested roadways. Routes 7 and 123 are major thoroughfares for vehicles traveling through Tysons to other destinations and are practically uncrossable by foot. Virtually all trips, even those within walking distance, are made in cars. Residents and workers complain about Tysons' lack of pedestrian and bicycle access, traffic bottlenecks, lack of parks and public amenities, limited purveyors of basic needs amongst the myriad shopping, and the impacts of poorly managed growth on neighboring residential communities. Add to this the arterial barriers represented by the Beltway and the Dulles Toll Road, as well as the lack of any feasible way of bypassing Tysons, and it is clear that Tysons simply cannot move forward to accommodate more growth under its existing design.

The Opportunity: Metrorail in Tysons Corner

With the finalization of plans to place four stations within Tysons Corner as part of the Metrorail extension to Dulles Airport, Fairfax County was presented with an opportunity to dramatically change and improve Tysons Corner. While the 1994 Comprehensive Plan had identified three potential stations, it failed to fully recognize the urban nature of the future Tysons or take advantage of a transit-based approach to planning. A decade of subsequent and continual piecemeal growth under the 1994 plan (without the presence of Metrorail) makes it clear why little of Tysons' positive potential was realized. Throughout its process, the Task Force has heard from many who were disappointed with the implementation of the 1994 Comprehensive Plan. It contained many good

ideas, sound objectives and important policies, but few of them were implemented. It clearly was time for a new plan.

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors recognized that “Tysons Corner is the economic engine driving Fairfax County to and through the 21st Century, and the conditions established by this Comprehensive Plan update must continue to foster the economic vitality of our urban center.” In response, the Board appointed a Task Force of stakeholders and citizens in May 2005 to update the 1994 plan to:

1. Promote more mixed use;
2. Better facilitate transit-oriented development (TOD);
3. Enhance pedestrian connections throughout Tysons;
4. Increase the residential component of the density mix;
5. Improve the functionality of Tysons, and;
6. Provide for amenities and aesthetics in Tysons, such as public spaces, public art, parks, etc.

The Response: Creating a 21st Century City

Ultimately expanding to include 36 members, the Task Force represented the wide range of community interests and perspectives essential to planning for the future of Tysons Corner. Early in the planning process, the Task Force realized that Tysons could not simply evolve from its current form. Real success could only come about through a radical transformation. While recognizing that realizing such a transformation would take many years if not decades, the Task Force understood that no transformation was possible without a grand vision.

In addition, the Task Force recognized that the historical process to plan, review, and implement developments on a project-by-project basis independent of surrounding properties would not provide the opportunity to achieve the community’s grand vision for Tysons Corner. A new planning process is needed to achieve common standards and design objectives that serve to integrate projects and implement plan elements that cross property boundaries. Thus it is not enough to present the vision, but also to create a new approach and tools to ensure its realization.

Presenting a Vision for Tysons Corner

This final report articulates and recommends a comprehensive and detailed vision for Tyson Corner to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. Achieving the vision will take many years, if not decades, and actual development will be greatly affected by market conditions, availability of infrastructure, the necessary phasing of development and amenities, a combination of public and private resources, as well as political will. Recognizing this, the Board of Supervisors directed that the Task Force involve and incorporate the views and concerns of surrounding communities, citizen groups, smart growth activists, businesses, employees, environmentalists and other special interests, in addition to landowners and developers. To do exactly this, the Task Force held some

150 public access meetings throughout the process, starting from the very beginning and long before any actual plans were drafted.

The Task Force has studied the issues and conditions in Tysons Corner extensively, worked with county staff and planning professionals, and engaged the broader public in meetings and workshops throughout the process. In addition, examples of other transit oriented areas through the country were examined, understanding that there are few, if any, of the scale and complexity of Tysons' 1,700 acres.

The result is a grand long-term vision for a completely transformed Tysons Corner. We are confident that the recommended specifications for detailed plan amendments will guide the appropriate staff and experts in creating final comprehensive plan language to implement that vision. Most important, presented in the report are two key elements essential to future success.

1) A Clear Framework for Articulating a Long-Term Vision

The Task Force is presenting a vision for Tysons Corner with a number of detailed characteristics that are essential to success. The vision presented will not be realized for several decades and the exact phasing and details of future development cannot be fully characterized today. However, the Task Force has identified a wide range of key components that must be achieved if Tysons is going to serve as a functional urban center for Fairfax County, achieving its share of projected regional growth.

2) Holistic Planning and Implementation

The Task Force also presents a holistic approach to planning and implementation that assures compliance with the amended plan, coordinates individual projects, and achieves the desired community benefits. The Task Force is recommending a process and organization involving a high degree of cooperation and coordination among landowners, employers, workers, residents of Tysons Corner and the surrounding communities, Fairfax County, and the State of Virginia. The key will be performance-based measurement of incremental success.

Framework for the 21st Century Tysons Corner

The Task Force final report contains a wide range of detailed recommendations. The summary of key points below represent those items that are essential to future development. While the exact details of each will evolve over time, none can be ignored.

Apply the Principles of Transit-Oriented Design

- **Transportation demand management.** Use a full range of transportation demand management strategies and incentives to encourage people to decrease the use of cars to and within Tysons Corner including a dramatic decrease in the availability of free parking.
- **Density focused at transit.** Focus growth and density within walking distance of transit, with the highest densities at the Metrorail stations.

- **Improved jobs/housing balance.** The preferred alternative identifies a large increase in residential and mixed use development. Up to 100,000 residents will live in Tysons Corner compared to 17,000 today. Jobs could increase from 110,000 today to as much as 200,000 at the end of the 30-year planning horizon. This would dramatically improve the ratio of jobs to residents and keep more people living where they work.
- **Fine grid of streets.** Transform the current superblocks into manageable streets to keep local traffic off key roadways and create more pathways for traffic flow and a safe, accessible pedestrian and bicycle environment.
- **Internal circulators.** Create a circulator transit system to allow frequent, quick, and inexpensive movement within Tysons and easy connections to regional transit systems.
- **Additional transit options.** Metrorail is just one of many transit options that are needed to connect the region to Tysons Corner. Community bus shuttles to Tysons, as well as integration with existing county bus service, is essential.

Create A People-Focused Urban Setting

- **Neighborhoods and culture.** The future of Tysons is envisioned as eight distinct neighborhoods, each with its own identity, culture, parks, residences, and jobs. Focus will be placed on creating venues and destinations where people want to spend time in the evenings and on weekends, defining Tysons as a more complete place.
- **Accessible urban streetscapes.** The new urban design will create smaller blocks throughout Tysons with a focus on pedestrian and bicycle access. The grid of streets will include complete sidewalks that allow people to safely walk throughout Tysons enhanced by shade trees, pedestrian amenities, and underground utilities.
- **Mixed use development with street-level retail.** People will be able to engage in routine errands, find restaurants, entertainment, and shopping all within walking distance of their homes, offices, and transit. Ground floor retail and convenience services are essential for residential buildings.
- **Workforce housing.** Much of the workforce at Tysons cannot afford to live in or close to it, making for long and expensive commutes. The preferred plan creates incentives to push the County policy for affordable and workforce housing beyond the current 12% to 20% of the housing that is constructed.
- **Design guidelines.** Specific aesthetic and planning guidelines will help to create a sense of place and pleasing environment.
- **Community services for an urban environment.** Police and safety services, libraries, health, and recreation facilities and services will be adapted to serve people quickly and effectively in an urban setting.

Place a Strong Focus on the Environment

- **Parks.** The preferred plan incorporates green spaces, trees, and neighborhood parks, creating a green network throughout Tysons. It also calls for a large signature park space that would serve as a central gathering and cultural point.

- **Green buildings.** The preferred plan encourages that all new buildings in Tysons achieve LEED silver certification by 2013.
- **Restored Environmental Features.** Restore and preserve existing environmental features and green space to create spaces for recreation and to preserve and enhance buffers to surrounding residential communities.
- **Rigorous Stormwater Management.** Effectively manage surface water by requiring detention, infiltration, and low impact development techniques to be used during redevelopment. The current estimate of 49% impervious surface in the two major watersheds must be decreased to the 10% optimal.

Create an Approach to Implementation that Provides the Authority, Flexibility, Accountability, and Resources Necessary to Achieve the Vision

Create an Implementing Authority to Oversee, Manage, and Implement Future Development

- Work as an adjunct to county staff with the authority to implement the broad vision.
- Coordinate with Fairfax County to create and use new approaches to improve planning and infrastructure.
- Develop, and revise over time, Design Guidelines to reflect the “vision”
- Recommend priorities and phasing, on an annual basis, for infrastructure improvements and public amenities.
- Participate in the zoning process and recommend changes to zoning ordinances and the use of incentives during the review process.
- Receive, collect and expend funds available from both public and private sources.
- Plan and implement initiatives to enhance the quality of life in Tysons Corner.

Explore and Use Diverse and Creative Funding Sources

- **Tax Increment Financing.** Designate Tysons as a TIF District with 25% of TIF funds being retained for the funding of necessary infrastructure in Tysons.
- **County, State & Federal funding.** Seek all possible funding and programs to promote common amenities and transportation improvements.
- **Proffers.** Continue to use the proffer system to encourage desired amenities.
- **Improvement Districts and Public-Private Partnerships.** Take advantage of the neighborhood organization to identify specific areas to develop these organizations.
- **Additional capital development authorities.** Create authorities as appropriate for capital projects.
- **Transfer of Development Rights.** Use TDRs including air rights to promote development and generate desired amenities.