

## SEVEN CORNERS VISIONING LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION TASK FORCE

### Minutes: December 11, 2012 Meeting

At 7:05 p.m. on December 11, 2012, Co-chair John Thillmann called the meeting to order. Task Force members present were Co-chair Mary Ellen Ward, Secretary Evelyn Haught, Karl Moritz, Jim McIlvaine, Jim Edmonson, Paul Byrtus, Martin Faga, Iqbal Khaiy, Mark Silverwood, Jim Edmonson, and Nathan Bath. Absent were Pat Hoar, Vincent Burke, and Randall Smith. Fairfax County staff present were Matthew Flis, Revitalization Program Manager of the Office of Community Revitalization (OCR); Aaron Frank, LEED Green Associate, Land Use & Development, Office of Supervisor Penny Gross, Mason District; Bernard Suchicital of the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ); Elizabeth Hagg, OCR; Michael Garcia of the Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT); Kris Morley-Nikfar, FCDOT; Charlene Fuhrman Schultz, Affordable Dwelling Unit Project Administrator, Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) and John Payne, A.I.A., Deputy Director of Real Estate, HCD. Mr. Frank announced that Supervisor Penny Gross had accepted the resignation of Task Force Member Randall Pence, who informed her that he was satisfied with the direction in which the Task Force was moving and therefore no longer felt the need to serve himself.

Members unanimously voted to approve the minutes of the November 13, 2012 meeting.

Ms. Schultz presented an oral summary of a housing report distributed to the Task Force that will be accessible to everyone on the Task Force's website. The report provides an overview of the Seven Corners study area. Ms. Schultz highlighted the following key facts:

- 8 residential communities containing approximately 1,663 housing units constitute the current housing in the study area.
- 5 of the 8 are rental apartment complexes with 1,232 units—74% of the housing stock in the study area.
- The 3 remaining communities are fee simple ownership units that include 395 condominiums and 36 townhouses—26% of the total housing stock in the study area.
- The majority of these residential communities was constructed in 1952 and is composed of low- to moderate-income renter-occupied housing.
- The Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan includes a Board of Supervisors' goal to provide opportunities for affordable housing

Ms. Schultz completed her presentation by stating that the goal of the Comprehensive Plan and, thus of any redevelopment of the Seven Corners study area, is to replace any affordable housing units lost as a result of redevelopment on a "one for one" basis, and that consideration should be given to providing these units in partnership with a nonprofit organization. She noted that under the County Zoning Ordinance, 12.5% of new housing units in a development must be affordable dwelling units (ADUs), with some exceptions for the construction type, particularly high-rise development.

Mr. Payne continued the housing presentation and noted that Fairfax County is losing housing affordable to lower-income households on a regular basis and added that the poorest are the most challenging to serve. He explained that the county pursues a variety of methods to meet these

housing needs.. One example he cited is an arrangement with developers that might allow them to build a greater number of units on a project that zoning might normally not allow (a density bonus). For example, a project that usually permits 100 units to be built on five acres might be allowed 120 units if a developer agrees to make a percentage of those units affordable. He also explained that high-rise construction generally costs 20%-30% more than frame construction and that parking alone for a high-rise project usually costs about \$40,000 more. These factors make the inclusion of affordable units in high-rise developments more challenging.

Mr. Payne said the county's housing authority owns, operates or manages about 3,500 units and also offers vouchers for another 3,600 units to supplement the income of renters who cannot afford even the usual modest rents of other low- and moderate-income units. He stated that Fairfax County was somewhat late in getting into public housing but, as a result, had an opportunity to learn from other jurisdictions' problems with such housing. One result is that Fairfax County allocates additional funding to support the maintenance and upkeep of housing units so as to keep them in good condition and attractive so that they remain an asset to the community.

Mr. Morley-Nikfar opened the second portion of the meeting with a presentation on traffic in the Seven Corners area, with special focus on current transit patterns. The great number of parking areas constitute an impediment to good connectivity, he observed, along with the paucity of truly walkable sidewalks and bicycle routes. While the East Falls Church Metro Station is less than a mile from Seven Corners, no direct bus lines connect to the station, making it difficult for people to use the subway system. He noted West Falls Church is only 2.6 miles away, but it is served by bus service traveling to and from Seven Corners. Mr. Morley Nikfar also stated that the primary interchange at Seven Corners constitutes the worst traffic intersection within the study area, but other noteworthy problem intersections, especially during evening traffic, are near Home Depot, Patrick Henry Drive, Route 7, and Roosevelt Street heading east.

Mr. Garcia informed the Task Force that FCDOT plans to do more detailed measurements of traffic congestion when it undertakes its study of the area. This would more accurately demonstrate how problems at one bottleneck impact intersections and traffic in surrounding areas. He explained that VDOT operates most traffic signals in the area, but Arlington County has jurisdiction over some signals, such as at Patrick Henry Drive at Route 50, because of the way the grid is constructed.

Co-chair Thillmann asked if it might be feasible to ask residents of some of the housing complexes where they need to go during the day, with the possibility of organizing carpools, rerouting some bus lines, etc. Mr. Garcia responded that this could be very helpful and it might not be necessary to wait for the completion of the Task Force's final recommendations to implement some of these transportation changes. Mr. Thillmann asked Mr. Silverwood, who purchased the East Falls Church Apartments in 2009 and renovated them for rental to low-income residents through 2027, if he might be able to ascertain the comings and goings of his renters to begin such an investigation. Mr. Silverwood noted that if it would be possible to get some of this renter population to, for example, the East Falls Church Metro Station, it could potentially open up new employment opportunities for them. Jim Edmondson, who also has housing property in the area, noted that when transit routes change, the users may also change their patterns of travel.

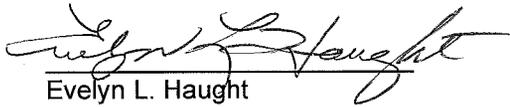
Mr. Garcia said the next step will be to undertake the transportation study, hire a consultant, count traffic at the intersections, observe the levels of transit service at them and the instances of delay; in brief, to fully understand existing problems, then look for opportunities to make improvements. Another component of the study will be testing what land uses the current zoning allows and its transportation impacts. When that information is fully gathered, it should enable the Task Force to brainstorm and develop recommendations. The Task Force group agreed this was a good strategy.

Co-chair Thillmann stated that the January 8<sup>th</sup> meeting will focus on mixed use development. Ms. Hagg indicated staff had identified a developer who would participate in that meeting. The February meeting will focus on retail and will feature Bruce Leonard, managing principal at Streetsense, or one

of his staff, to discuss retail trends. A staff member from the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (EDA) will also participate. Mr. Thillmann stressed his interest in scheduling a bus tour of the Seven Corners study area for a Saturday in April, with the hope of offering any additional free seats to interested members of the public. He reminded members that the May Task Force meeting will be the next session open for public comment. He stated that by June 2013 the Task Force members should all have attained the same level of knowledge and be in a position to begin making recommendations.

Secretary Haught announced that she would be living outside the Washington area, a commitment made before the creation of the Task Force, during the months of January and February, but would follow the proceedings on the website. Co-chair Thillmann said he would work with staff to manage the preparation of minutes during her absence.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

  
Evelyn L. Haught  
Task Force Secretary

January 8, 2013  
Date