

August 12, 2014

**Comments of the Sleepy Hollow Manor Citizens Association  
On the Seven Corners Land Use & Transportation Task Force's  
Revised Draft Comprehensive Plan dated July 7, 2014**

TO: Seven Corners Task Force chairman and members  
TO: Fairfax County Board Transportation Committee Chairman

CC: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors members  
CC: Fairfax County School Board chairman and members  
CC: Fairfax County Public Schools Superintendent

The SHMCA would like to thank the Task Force for your work planning the revitalization of the Seven Corners area. We appreciate your dedication, as well as the work of the Fairfax County staff, to support the redevelopment of the Seven Corners CBC. This area is our home and we will be greatly impacted by revitalization, as you know.

On June 23, 2014, our citizens association submitted written and oral comments on the portions of the draft Task Force report that had been made public prior to that date. Those comments signaled SHMCA's support of the overall Task Force vision for Seven Corners, and highlighted some concerns regarding density, impact on schools, implementation of the public infrastructures and encroachment on the Shadeland cul de sac.

This letter aims to outline and emphasize our concerns regarding the implementation of the transportation plan that was presented to the public on June 23, 2014. We make suggestions we hope the Task Force will include in the final version of its report to the County.

Sleepy Hollow Manor Citizens Association agrees with the intent of the recommendations to maximize the future use of non-vehicular modes of transportation while still providing an efficient circulation for vehicles.

However, we feel strongly that the Seven Corners Task Force draft plan is too vague when it comes to implementation, particularly with respect to transportation. The current draft of the plan does not put enough emphasis on the need for transportation improvements to mapped out prior to development, and for construction of public improvements to be coordinated with construction on the Opportunity parcels. This is very problematic. We believe that the purpose of the plan should be both to lay out a new vision for Seven Corners and to provide guidance about how it can be achieved. The "how" of the transportation implementation is critical to those of us who live here and drive on these roads every day. The plan should include stronger language to guide its implementation.

The Seven Corners area cannot live up to the potential of the Task Force's vision without a comprehensive reworking of the current antiquated and overloaded system of roadways and intersections. The Phase II transportation study projects that, by 2040, most of the major intersections in the current configuration will be operating at Level of Service F during peak hours, with average delays of 98.3 seconds per vehicle and traffic queues extending into travel lanes of major thoroughfares. Ever-worsening traffic snarls and delays will make the area less attractive from every standpoint. Clearly, rebuilding of the transportation system and redevelopment of the adjoining properties need to proceed in tandem.

To its credit, the Task Force has done a good job of coming up with a conceptual plan for dealing with transportation issues in the Seven Corners area. According to the Phase II transportation study, the plan works from a traffic-engineering standpoint and, if fully implemented, would substantially improve traffic flow in and around the area compared to the County's current long-term plan. We applaud the thought and study that have gone into development of the transportation plan and would like to see it implemented quickly.

Implementation of the transportation plan is a critical step in the redevelopment of the Seven Corners CBC. The Task Force report will become the basis for a comprehensive plan amendment, which will allow property owners to begin the process of permitting projects under the Redevelopment Options contemplated by the report. Indeed, a proposal to redevelop the Sears parcel at dramatically increased density has already been circulated. The Redevelopment Options assume the transportation plan can be implemented.

Unfortunately, there are substantial questions whether key parts of the transportation plan are feasible. Specifically, both the construction of the ring road and the relocation of the transportation center are likely to require the agreement of entities that are not part of the Task Force process and cannot be assumed to be willing to participate in the plan. Without the cooperation of these entities, the plan's entire conceptual street network may need to be rethought. And since the conceptual street network dictates where new buildings may be sited and how they must be oriented, it is clear that the practicability and details of the transportation plan need to be established before redevelopment can begin.

The following two examples illustrate the dangers of moving forward with the redevelopment process before a detailed transportation plan is in place.

- A. The Feasibility of the Ring Road. The most important component of the transportation plan is the construction of the ring road. The ring road is essential not only to divert traffic around the Seven Corners intersection but to provide a direct connection between Leesburg Pike and Roosevelt Boulevard and the East Falls Church Metro station for circulator buses and other vehicles.

In order to provide that direct connection, however, the ring road must run directly through the Corner shopping center property, which is not part of the redevelopment area. The owner of the Corner property has chosen not to participate in the Task Force process, and there is no assurance that the owner would permit the ring road to be built over that property. Nor can the ring road be rerouted around the Corner property without eliminating the direct connection to Roosevelt Boulevard and requiring a higher spine road bridge to accommodate the Arlington Boulevard ramps that will run below it. Raising the bridge, in turn, would affect redevelopment of both the Seven Corners Center parcel and the Willston Center parcels in unforeseen ways.

Furthermore, completion of any ring road around the Seven Corners intersection requires the cooperation of the City of Falls Church. While the City has been monitoring the Task Force process, there is no official assurance that the City is prepared to allow a significant volume of traffic to flow through the residential area behind the Eden Center. On the contrary, the City already prohibits rush hour traffic on that portion of Sycamore Street, which is the obvious route for the ring road. We assume the Task Force recognized this reality when it removed the Falls Church portions of the ring road from its drawings of the conceptual street network.

Indeed, an August 6 article in the Falls Church New Press brings home the danger of assuming the City will cooperate with the Task Force's transportation plan. Reporting on the August 4 Falls Church City Planning Commission meeting at which the Seven Corners transportation plan was presented, the article says "the whole project came as a surprise to members of the Planning Commission and Citizens Advisory Committee on Transportation (CACT) present for Monday's briefing" despite the fact that "[t]wo members of the Falls Church City staff have been involved in numerous [Task Force] visioning and planning sessions ...".

- B. The Location of the New Transportation Center. The transportation plan relies heavily on circulator busses and other public transportation to reduce traffic congestion in the redeveloped Seven Corners area. In order for this to happen, however, the existing transportation center, currently located adjacent to Arlington Boulevard, will need to be relocated and expanded to provide better access to Leesburg Pike and the proposed ring road link to Roosevelt Boulevard.

But relocating the transportation center to the Leesburg Pike / Thorne Road intersection, as the plan proposes, is problematic, even if the ring road can be built as contemplated by the draft plan. The only corner of that intersection that is included in the redevelopment area is the northeast corner, which is at the narrow end of the Seven Corners Center parcel. That portion of the parcel is slated for construction of 8-to-12-story buildings, in part because it sits well below the level of Leesburg Pike. But a transportation center would need to be built at street level, which would require extensive backfilling and retaining walls. Those, in turn, would encroach on the planned redevelopment of the parcel and are unlikely to be proffered. The other three corners of that intersection are small parcels located outside the redevelopment area, and their owners have no incentive to make them available for a transportation center.

Every building that is built before a detailed transportation plan is finalized will add to the congestion in the Seven Corners area and foreclose future options for dealing with that congestion. Once new structures are in place on Opportunity parcels, they cannot be removed to make way for a redesigned road system. If key parts of the transportation plan turn out not to be feasible and need to be rethought after the redevelopment process is underway, an already complex transportation-planning problem will become even more difficult and expensive to solve.

Unfortunately, it may be years before we know whether the Task Force's conceptual road network plan is even feasible. The County has commissioned a \$3.0 million study of possible improvements to the Seven Corners intersection, but the study is only partially funded and planning and scoping are not projected to be completed before June 2018. Only then can the improvements be designed, rights-of-way acquired, utilities sited, and construction begin. None of these implementation phases has even been scheduled, let alone funded.

SHMCA recommends that the Task Force incorporate the following elements in the final draft of the report:

- The Task Force's report should explicitly state that a workable design for transportation improvements must be in place before redevelopment can proceed.

- To that end, the Task Force should urge the County to provide full funding for its ongoing transportation study of the Seven Corners intersection and to coordinate that work with amendment of the Comprehensive Plan for our area.
- In addition, the Task Force should strongly recommend that the Board of Supervisors consider Seven Corners a transportation priority so that construction can be funded and completed in tandem with the redevelopment contemplated by the report.

In addition to stressing the importance of having a workable long-term transportation plan, the report should also suggest and advocate for interim measures, such as bicycle lanes on Sleepy Hollow Road and Patrick Henry Drive, that can be implemented now. We understand that roadways and infrastructures located on the Opportunity parcels will be built at the time of redevelopment, but many other facilities can be enhanced and modified as soon as the area vision is approved. We believe that the plan should suggest such opportunities for near-term transportation improvements. This will help all of the stakeholders -- government, developers and residents -- to know how to make the Task Force's vision a reality.

We applaud the Task Force process, a much-needed effort to stop haphazard commercial construction and start redeveloping our area in a coordinated way that will make it an attractive place to live, work, shop, dine and play. We thank the Task Force members for the time, thought and care you have put into that effort. But it is not enough merely to articulate an overall vision for the redevelopment process. The Task Force can and should provide guidance about how that vision is to be implemented; otherwise the intention of the plan will be jeopardized. While we recognize that the specific details of implementation must be left to the County and the property owners, the Task Force is uniquely positioned to advise the County on such matters as coordination of planning and construction of public improvements with redevelopment of private parcels. We very strongly urge you to do so in the final version of your report.

Respectfully submitted,



On Behalf of the Sleepy Hollow Manor Citizens Association