The Taxpayer and Strawman III of August 15, 2012

by Louis Freeman

A cardinal rule for a Tysons financial plan should be: do not commit the County, and hence the taxpayers, to open-ended expenditures. The Strawman III draft of August 15, 2012 has important improvements over Strawman II. However, there are places in the text which can be interpreted to commit taxpayers to such expenditures.

Recommendation 15 in lines 382-389, page 10 of the clean draft (lines 407-415 of the strike or markup draft) explicitly commits the County as the money source of last resort regardless of the amount of money or how untimely the need may be. In order to not exceed our debt limit, and keep our good credit rating, so ably described on pages 16 and 17 of the clean draft, this recommendation appears to put Tysons ahead of roads, schools, or other capital expenditures anywhere in the County. The last sentence of the Rec 15 first paragraph should be deleted. It might be replaced by a more practical view that "the County will do its best to fund its assigned road projects even if sufficient state and federal money are not available, but in that case, some delays in approval for building construction and occupancy may occur."

Recommendation 22 (lines 581-586, pg 15 of clean; or lines 622-627, pg 16 of strike) can also be interpreted as an unlimited County funding commitment, regardless of how untimely. The wording also appears to commit to all transportation improvements, even those assigned to the private sector. As above, this recommendation needs to be deleted. It too might be replaced by a more practical statement as above, or including a cap on public expenditures.

There are other places in Strawman III which deal with construction, but could leave taxpayers with "surprise" expenses if not handled properly.

Rec 23 (lines 589-608, pgs 15-16 of clean; or lines 630-649, pgs 16-17 of strike) has a first paragraph calling for periodic status reviews by the BOS. The third paragraph, however, says the review should include "members of the community" and two organizations probably dominated by Tysons landowners. The wording should be expanded to say that "the review team should include adequate and effective representation from the communities surrounding Tysons and from the County's taxpayers."

Rec 25 (lines 613-620, pg 16 of clean; or lines 655-662, pg 17 of strike) says that additions to Table 7 should be funded by "the development" that exceeds the 2050 threshold. It is not clear what "the development" means. Does it mean the landowners and developers? Strawman III needs to be explicit about who is paying for necessary additions.

The last sentence of Rec 25 could be used to leave the whole Tysons redevelopment without proper transportation routes. The sentence should be deleted. The current Table 7 contains projects that are needed. Neither the County nor the landowners need to be told to not build something that turns out to not be needed. If that is a concern, then the periodic review referred to above should include

another transportation study. We do not want to delete needed transportation projects from the planning.

Finally, the office IDL discussion and Rec 30 (lines 724-774, pgs 19-20 of clean; or lines 766-817, pgs 20-21 of strike) could result in Board approval of additional office construction based simply on paper plans for infrastructure progress and funding. The result of that could be an overbuilt Tysons without the infrastructure needs. The discussion and the Rec should be changed to say that "no increase in IDL should be considered until construction progress on the ground, including residential construction, and funding money in the bank, clearly indicates that additional office construction is desirable."

When the PCTC and then the PC make its recommendation to the BOS, please do not recommend actions that could leave the Count y and its taxpayers with potential unlimited funding commitments or unhappy future surprises.