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Tysons Land Use Task Force White Paper

January 2010

Over the last 45 years, Tysons Corner has developed from farmland to the 12th largest commercial business district in the United States, and now, it is poised to begin its greatest transformation ever. With the expectation of MetroRail within three years, Tysons Corner has potential to transform from a sprawling suburban office center into a vibrant urban center with a rich mix of uses.

Extraordinary consensus was reached within the Task Force among frequently competing interests on a vision for Tysons. There is an understanding and commitment to the concept that the vision holds together only as a whole and that its many projected benefits cannot be achieved without density and incentives for redevelopment.

The Tysons Task Force vision includes substantial increases in density, a doubling of jobs, a grid of streets, a mixed-use urban center with a five-fold increase in residents, housing for moderate income workers, aggressive energy and environmental commitments, parks and open spaces, protection for surrounding communities, and a shift from cars to a complete multi-modal transportation system friendly to pedestrians and to bicycles.

It will take the next several decades and beyond to fulfill Tysons' potential, but decisions made in the months to come are critical. Now is the time to "get it right".

We have a choice. We can say "How do we do this?" or we can say "What should we limit?" If we do not provide incentives for substantial redevelopment, it is certain that the vision will not be achieved, the benefits anticipated will not be realized, and congestion and sprawl will worsen because development will be pushed out and away from transit.

We need not look far to see how what is envisioned for Tysons can make a difference. Arlington County had substantial development in its mixed use corridors in the last decade. The County is attracting residents and jobs to mixed use communities. Despite many more people, cars on the County's major roads decreased 5 percent in five years and there are no more cars on Arlington County roads than there were 15 years ago. Almost half of the County residents do not commute by car and one-sixth of households do not have a car.

In contrast, despite success in places like Bethesda, a recent study found that Maryland's smart-growth program has largely failed because, the study concluded, there were inadequate incentives for redevelopment and there was resistance to change.

What are our choices?

There are some who believe that large increases in development lead to a comparable increase in roads. The experience in Arlington County proves otherwise. With MetroRail and other transit, and with the opportunity to live and to work within Tysons, it is possible to accommodate more people with fewer cars going to and from Tysons.

County staff analyses show a modest increase in traffic in the next 20 years despite opening of MetroRail and other transit options, but also show that growth between 2030 and 2050 can be accommodated without increased trips to or from Tysons, just as has been achieved in Arlington. There is broad consensus and evidence that a transit-centered approach, combined with targeted road improvements, will be effective and will protect the surrounding communities from a flood of cars. Moreover, this approach shows Tysons' roads functioning at a better level in 20 to 40 years than they do now.

The Arlington experience, in fact, suggests that faster redevelopment may result in more rapid reductions in automobile use.

Perspectives

The Task Force believes there are three perspectives that should inform final decisions on the Tysons plan:

- 1) Tysons must be seen as a whole;
- 2) Economics, including both incentives and requirements, are essential to redevelopment; and
- 3) What is not developed in Tysons will go elsewhere.

Tysons can and should be a shining example of an urban center and a credit to Fairfax County and to citizen involvement and vision. But, it must be seen as a whole--as one large transit-oriented development (TOD). There is a critical difference on the impact to Tysons of having only one large TOD as opposed to having four small TODs near MetroRail stations and viewing large remaining acreage as not transit-oriented. Tysons must be seen as one integrated and cohesive "place" and its planning should be approached on all levels. Focus should not be placed solely on small areas around the MetroRail.

Planning, and associated infrastructure and amenities, must be assessed within the framework of the ultimate vision.

The Task Force believes that benefits of its plan will not be achieved without proper incentives and without the economics necessary to support redevelopment with the benefits proposed.

The choice is not between redevelopment in Tysons and no development. What is not developed in Tysons will be developed somewhere else. The choice is largely between redevelopment in Tysons and development in other, less urban parts of Northern Virginia. In some situations, the choice is between redevelopment in Tysons and sending major economic development and the accompanying benefits to other parts of the country.

Two Remaining Critical Issues

Consensus on how to achieve the vision for Tysons has been achieved on many aspects of the Task Force plan. Many differences regarding how to implement the plan have been resolved; other differences have been narrowed substantially. Two critical issues remain unresolved:

- 1) The density or intensity permitted on redeveloping properties, and the accompanying heights of buildings near the rail stations; and
- 2) How development is to be phased.

Density

A critical decision is whether to encourage major redevelopments that contribute to Tysons' potential, recognizing that not all of Tysons will redevelop within 40 years, or whether to propose smaller redevelopment potential over the next 40 years, with the risk that such a proposal, when combined with requirements and expectations placed on landowners, will, for many, eliminate the incentive for redevelopment.

There is also a difference in approaches regarding whether to restrict individual projects and assume that all of Tysons will be redeveloped by 2050 or whether to propose the type of redevelopment that would be desirable, particularly within a half-mile of the MetroRail stations, recognizing that much of that will not be developed to its authorized potential by 2050.

The Task Force agrees with County staff on the aggregate level of development that may occur in Tysons by 2050, projected to be about 113 million square feet. The Task Force acknowledges that it likely will be difficult to achieve this level of redevelopment by 2050 regardless of density levels incorporated in the Plan, but sees the level as a worthy and achievable objective within the range of projections that have been made. It has taken over 40 years for Tysons to develop to 46 million square feet and, at a similar pace, arriving at the level of 113 million square feet will likely take another 40 years if not somewhat more. Reducing the densities around the MetroRail stations in order to restrain overall Tysons-wide densities will result in lost potential of concentrated urban growth.

The Task Force understands that we should be mindful of potential development beyond 2050 but also recognizes that we should not be unduly frightened by it. County staff

project a potential increase in development from 84 million square feet to 113 million square feet between 2030 and 2050 with no increase in trips to and from Tysons. Further, County staff maintain that the increase in development can be accommodated without increased trips by increasing mixed use development, adding more residents in Tysons, implementing TOD, and increasing transit use and other alternatives to single occupancy vehicles. As noted previously, that projection is consistent with the experience in Arlington where substantial recent development has been accompanied by reduced vehicle traffic.

It would be unreasonable to assume that if development between 2030 and 2050 produces no increase in trips to and from Tyson, further development beyond 2050 automatically increases such trips. It is, however, reasonable to address this issue through mechanisms such as phasing and performance-based measures related to total or net trips.

If we are truly visionary and bold in approach, it is possible to achieve a Tysons that works for everyone. If we are cautious, we may discourage redevelopment by not providing sufficient density but still demanding substantial costs and contributions.

Failure to adopt visionary plan language for Tysons will most likely result in less growth, fewer benefits, and less change from a Tysons that is suburban and car-oriented. We could realize the worst of situations—an area not significantly redeveloped, with underused rail stations surrounded by clogged roads where there is no safe pedestrian or bicycle access and where people do not want to live or work.

Phasing

County staff analyses have shown that Tysons can accommodate more new development in the next 40 years than economic analysis shows is likely. There is agreement that further projection and an orderliness of development can be provided by phasing development. Different options for phasing are being considered. The Task Force envisions a dynamic phasing approach that will balance infrastructure needs, the desire to create dense, pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods, developer costs, and community benefits.

The Task Force will continue to work with all parties to develop a workable and appropriate approach to phasing. The Task Force believes that specific criteria should be used in development of the phasing strategy. Phasing implementation should be dynamic; what works now may not be what works best in five years. The County could use the implementation entity being planned in phasing and the evolution of phasing.

Phasing could be applied to specific projects and coordinated developments as well as to aggregate development within Tysons. There will be agreements with landowners regarding many things, including managing trips to and from Tysons. Much is being asked of landowners. The public sector, however, also has responsibilities. Creative financing approaches should be considered to help get things done. Plans should be

based on the public sector meeting its responsibility in a timely manner and landowners should not be constrained by public sector failures.

Tysons can be extraordinary

With coordinated planning, incentives for major redevelopment, measures to reduce auto-dependency, and responsible phasing of redevelopment, Tysons can be extraordinary. Arlington's experience shows that the sooner we expedite the transformation of Tysons to an urban center, the sooner we will benefit.

Allowable density for Tysons must be flexible enough to induce timely development. That, in turn, holds the promise that Tysons will be a transit-dependent area, will attract residents, retain existing and attract new businesses and organizations, and demonstrate the enduring value of transit-oriented development.

We need to make sure that Tysons becomes what it can and should be; we need to fulfill the vision.