Planning Commission Meeting
October 30, 2008
Verbatim Excerpt

S06-IV-S1 – COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT (SPRINGFIELD MALL)

After Close of the Public Hearing

Chairman Murphy: The public hearing is closed; recognize Mr. Lusk.

Commissioner Lusk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This Plan Amendment has been two and a half years in the making. And I'm very delighted to have it come before the Planning Commission this evening. As you are aware, the Springfield Mall is a regional shopping mall comprised of approximately 1.84 million square feet. And it is the third largest mall in Fairfax County behind Tysons Corner and Fair Oaks Mall. Each of these malls has been improved and enlarged over the past five years with the exception of Springfield Mall which has unfortunately seen very few improvements since its last major remodel which took place in the mid 1980s. As a result Springfield Mall has a very dark and uninviting appearance to shoppers who frequent the open and natural light flow of spaces in Tysons Corner and Fair Oaks. Springfield Mall has also had difficulty in attracting the major name tenants that are now mainstays at these other improved regional centers. And the community recognizes that these retail users will not come to an unimproved and outdated shopping center. From a transportation perspective, we all know that Springfield Mall is proximate to one of the most heavily-used Metro stations in WMATA's system, the Joe Alexander Transportation Center, and the now fully-completed and functioning Springfield Interchange. In light of this, the mall today does not provide its patrons with the necessary pedestrian, bicycle, and shuttle-related amenities or connectivities. The Plan language before us that discusses transportation will help remedy these shortcomings by requiring the Town Center project to add additional road capacity, intersection traffic mitigation, circulation, pedestrian and bicycle connectivity enhancements, and the implementation of an effective, I say effective, TDM program. With this background, the District Supervisor, the citizens of Lee District, and this Planning Commissioner, are very excited about the future of this mall. We recognize that the proposed land use changes afforded by this Plan Amendment will be a catalyst that ultimately results in creating a new and improved Springfield. We are also delighted that the mall has been purchased by Vornado, a real estate investment trust that has extensive experience in repositioning older malls via redevelopment and re-tenanting. Vornado has completed a number of successful mixed use projects, including a similarly situated mall redevelopment in Paramus, New Jersey. The first step, of course, in securing this highly anticipated redevelopment and transformation of this mall property is to amend the Plan language. The Plan language that we have before us this evening seeks to provide a framework that will permit the 80-acre Springfield Mall property to be developed as a mixed use Town Center development with residential, retail, hotel, and office uses. This improved center, per the Plan language, is envisioned to be pedestrian, bike, and transit friendly. It will have amenities, streetscape, plazas, parks, and public spaces, and I reiterate this, to draw neighboring residents into the Center. And these amenities will encourage the new residents of this Town Center to live, work, and shop in their own back yards. And we all recognize that this has the added benefit of reducing traffic congestion and environmental pollution. This Plan language also allows us to encourage

revitalization of the older commercial and residential properties in the study area. The inclusion of office at this site will help provide a better mix of commercial with the residential and retail uses on the subject property. Additionally, this office development might be tied to BRAC and become the home of contractors that are connected to Fort Belvoir's main post or, for Ms. Harsel, the Engineering Proving Ground. The buildings that will be developed on this mall property will be oriented to an internal or main street network. This main street will include ground floor retail and restaurants, and have office, with hotel uses incorporated in these mixed use buildings. These buildings will be comprised of high-quality architecture, landscaping, and lighting. And the buildings will incorporate, which I think is good, "green" building practices. In conclusion, this Plan Amendment and this language will result in the overall improvement of a regional mall that has unfortunately lost some of its luster. The new mall will morph into one that is mixed use and that contains a number of features that are now commonplace in the other updated malls in this County and in the region. The mix of uses that will exist in this Town Center will be a draw to local residents as well as those residing in the new Town Center. The public spaces, which are planned to be both passive and active, will be accessible, be it foot, car, bicycle, or bus. The buildings will be on a pedestrian scale and of the quality that will begin to see some of the name tenants that residents of this area have been clamoring to see come into this community. These Plan improvements will help diversify the commercial tax base, which Fairfax County desperately needs. And I would venture to guess – I'll make a prediction – that once all the improvements are completed, Springfield Mall could become the second largest mall in Fairfax County. Mr. Chairman, the Lee District Land Use Committee supports this Plan Amendment. And it is with great enthusiasm and, I'll say optimism, toward the future of both Springfield and this County that I make the following motion. I MOVE THAT THE PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMEND TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS THE ADOPTION OF THE STAFF RECOMMENDATION FOR PLAN AMENDMENT S06-IV-S1, AS SHOWN ON PAGES 28 THROUGH 39 OF THE STAFF REPORT – in the staff report, DATED OCTOBER 16TH, 2008.

Commissioner Sargeant: Second

Chairman Murphy: Seconded by Mr. Sargeant, is there a discussion? The Chair also seconds the motion. Is there a discussion of the motion? All those in favor of the motion to recommend to the Board of Supervisors that it adopt Out-of-Turn Plan Amendment S06-IV-S1, say aye.

Commissioners: Aye.

Chairman Murphy: Opposed? Motion carries.

Commissioner Lusk: Mr. Chairman, may I add a follow on? As staff has indicated, and I will take probably 60 seconds to read this, THE APPLICANT WOULD MODIFY THE PLAN LANGUAGE FOR AN 80-ACRE PORTION OF THE 182-ACRE SUBJECT AREA, LAND UNIT B OF THE FRANCONIA/SPRINGFIELD TRANSIT AREA, TO ADD AN OPTION FOR A MIXED-USE TOWN CENTER. THE TOWN CENTER WOULD INCLUDE

RESIDENTIAL, RETAIL, OFFICE, AND HOTEL USES, AND HAVE AN INTENSITY OF UP TO 1.71 FAR, WITH PARTIAL CONSOLIDATION, AND 1.82 FAR WITH FULL CONSOLIDATION. THE TOWN CENTER WOULD NEED TO ACHIEVE CERTAIN CONDITIONS RELATED TO URBAN DESIGN, MIXTURE OF LAND USES, TRANSPORTATION, AND THE ENVIRONMENT, TO NAME A FEW. ANY UNCONSOLIDATED PARCELS WITHIN LAND UNIT B WOULD REMAIN AT THEIR BASE PLAN RECOMMENDATION FOR RETAIL USE UP TO AN INTENSITY OF .35 FAR. AND FINALLY, AS AN IMPORTANT NOTE, PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ANY OTHER PORTIONS OF THE 182-ACRE SUBJECT PROPERTY WOULD NOT BE AMENDED. With that, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Commissioner Lawrence: Second the follow on.

Chairman Murphy: Is that going to be incorporated in your motion?

Commissioner Lusk: It's the follow-on motion to the portion that was not fully vetted with the Committee. It's a motion.

Chairman Murphy: SO MOVED. Is there a second to the motion?

Commissioners Lawrence and Sargeant: Second.

Chairman Murphy: Mr. Sargeant and Mr. Lawrence. Discussion?

Commissioner Hall: Yes.

Chairman Murphy: Yes, Ms. Hall.

Commissioner Hall: Sorry. Mr. Chairman, I want a clarification. You said, "the applicant." The applicant for this case is the Board of Supervisors. Is that who is requesting the follow on motion?

Commissioner Lusk: The motion is being made on behalf of the Board of Supervisors. That is correct.

Commissioner Hall: It is the Board?

Commissioner Lusk: Yes.

Commissioner Hall: Okay; just wanted to get a clarification.

Chairman Murphy: Further discussion?

Commissioner Harsel: Mr. Chairman?

Commissioner Lusk: Mr. Chairman, if can just clarify one point as well, we mentioned earlier that if any of the folks who came and testified this evening wanted to provide additional comments for the record, please feel free to do that. We leave the record open in the conclusion of this discussion for those written and electronic comments.

Chairman Murphy: Further discussion? Mrs. Harsel.

Commissioner Harsel: They have to submit them to the Board. Only if you defer could they continue.

Chairman Murphy: Whatever. They'll work it out.

Commissioner Lusk: The intent is that we get the comments. And, again, those comments will be considered, as Ms. Harsel has said, at the Board of Supervisors.

Commissioner Harsel: Mr. Lusk, read the last two or three sentences. Did you – where you used the 182 acre part.

Commissioner Lusk: Okay. You want me to go back. Okay, yes. That's the last sentence, so, "Any unconsolidated parcels within Land Unit B would remain at their base plan recommendation" –

Commissioner Harsel: I understood that.

Commissioner Lusk: – "for retail use" – well, this is all one sentence. You asked me to read the whole thing.

Commissioner Harsel: Okay, go.

Commissioner Lusk: I'm doing as you asked. "And finally, as an important note," because you are the secretary, "Plan recommendations for any other portions of the 182-acre subject area would not be amended."

Commissioner Harsel: Okay. So that means that the CBC could not be amended, according to that motion.

Commissioner Lusk: Well, this isn't the CBC.

Commissioner Harsel: Yes, it's on – that's the 183 acres, isn't it?

Commissioner Lusk: No, no.

Commissioner Harsel: So what's the 183 acres? What the 100 acres? We know this is 80. What's the other 100? What's the parameters of that?

Meghan Van Dam, Planning Division, Department of Planning and Zoning: This sector – directed at staff? The 182 acres, this is within the Franconia/Springfield Transit Station area. The CBC is on the west side of the Interstate.

Commissioner Harsel: Okay. So he's saying that Land Unit A1, A2, C, F2, F1, and E could not be amended? Is that what that motion – that's what –

Commissioner Lusk: Right. We're saying that any of the unconsolidated parcels that are in that Land Unit B would remain at their Plan recommendations, right, assuming that –

Commissioner Harsel: Yes, I got that.

Commissioner Lusk: Okay. And then we're saying that any other portions of the 182-acre subject area would not be amended. So the portions outside the boundaries for Land Unit B, which goes –

Commissioner Harsel: All right. That would not be amended at this time.

Commissioner Lusk: Correct.

Commissioner Harsel: But it's open for amendment if they decide; or are we shutting off any amendments to the rest of it?

Commissioner Lusk: That would be in the future, I'm assuming.

Commissioner Harsel: The way the motion is reading, it would not be amended.

Chairman Murphy: Let her answer. Go ahead, Meghan

Ms. Van Dam: Excuse me. There would need – we would need another Board authorization to consider that for a separate Plan amendment. It doesn't mean that – this does not preclude any amendment in the future. But the motion on the floor right now is just regarding Land Unit B.

Commissioner Harsel: Okay. So I – Mr. Chairman, I would feel more comfortable if the maker of the motion would say, "THIS MOTION DOES NOT AMEND ANY OF THE REST OF IT, BUT THAT OPTION IS OPEN." The way you read it –

Commissioner Lusk: Yes.

Commissioner Harsel: You see what I'm trying – I'm not trying to fuss.

Chairman Murphy: Further discussion of the motion? He said yes.

Commissioner Hart: Mr. Chairman?

Chairman Murphy: Yes, Mr. Hart.

Commissioner Hart: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Murphy: We're on verbatim, guys.

Commissioner Hart: Yes, I know we are. I understood that the first motion was we were voting on what was in the staff report. The second motion, I wasn't following. It's something over and above the staff report that hasn't been fully vetted by – who didn't fully vet it? I thought, I understood you were saying that the second motion was something that hadn't been fully vetted.

Commissioner Lusk: What I was saying is that I didn't get to finish the motion that I was originally making. So it was essentially one motion but when the Chairman closed it and it went into the vote, I had to make it as a follow on.

Commissioner Hart: Is that amending something that was in the staff report?

Commissioner Lusk: No, it's an additional portion of the original motion.

Commissioner Hart: Staff doesn't – staff supports this second motion, whatever it is?

Marianne Gardner, Planning Division, Department of Planning and Zoning: Yes, we do.

Commissioner Hart: Okay.

Ms. Gardner: All the motion does is indicate that the part of the Plan that we're amending is Land Unit B, which is essentially the mall. And even though the authorization gave us the ability to look at a larger area, we are not suggesting any Plan changes.

Commissioner Hart: I understand. I got it.

Chairman Murphy: Further discussion of the motion? All those in favor of the motion, say aye.

Commissioners: Aye.

Chairman Murphy: Opposed? Motion carries.

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(The motions carried unanimously.)

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