

Hunter Mill District Supervisor Walter Alcorn
Sept. 12, 2023
Statement on Reston Comprehensive Plan

Mr. Chairman, before making my motion I would like to thank Hunter Mill Commissioner John Carter, the whole Planning Commission, the Reston Comprehensive Plan Task Force, county staff, the Hunter Mill office staff, your staff, my colleagues on the Board, all the Restonians that provided input, and the cadre of citizens that spend countless hours reviewing and improving land use proposals and keeping Reston the great place it is to live, work and play.

The background of this effort may help the board put this vote into context. On Jan. 14, 2020 this Board of Supervisors approved a motion made by me to initiate a public participation process and authorize a new amendment to the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan for Reston. This motion included 9 specific areas of focus. This was followed by a 100 percent remote community task force, which met for two years during the pandemic and, as a whole, 58 times. On Jan. 24, 2023 another motion was adopted by this Board which allowed consideration of 9 additional areas which arose during task force and community discussions. Those actions, along with discussions at 2 meetings of the Board's Land Use and Policy Committee, 3 Planning Commission workshops, 2 Planning Commission public hearings, a staff report and a staff report addendum, additional staff modifications, countless drafts, and at least a dozen community meetings during the past 18 months have gotten us to the proposal before us today.

It is important to note that of the 18 specific items included in the 2 Board authorization motions, not all elements were ultimately addressed – or at least addressed comprehensively – in this update to the Comprehensive Plan for Reston. Two items will be considered under the SSPA process, two other items are the subject of study for amending the countywide Policy Plan section of the Comprehensive Plan (that's on Equity and Community Health), several items were explored and ultimately not included as new comprehensive plan language, and 3 are the subject of a follow-on motion. Seven areas in the authorizing motions are included in Planning Commission/staff recommendations and my proposed final markups.

Before making my motion, I would like to make a few brief observations. First, Reston is the preeminent post-World War II planned community in the United States. As noted in the introductory paragraph in this proposed plan, the challenge is maintaining fidelity to Reston's original vision while meeting the new challenges (and opportunities) of today. Second, as shown in the handout to the Board on the hypothetical buildout associated with the existing Reston Comprehensive Plan and the proposed comprehensive plan before us today – in both the existing and the proposed plans Reston has twice as many housing units planned than exist today. This plan and process proves that even in times of the highest levels of community concern and anxiety about growth and development, this is a consensus community plan. Focusing growth around Metrorail is not only possible, it is the reality in Reston.

Third, Reston is not only a demonstration of a well-planned and executed planned community, now with emerging transit-oriented communities, it is also a demonstration of a successful “missing middle” development strategy undertaken decades before the term was ever conceived. This is born out by some interesting data about Reston. The older part of Reston – outside of Reston Town Center and the Transit-Oriented Development areas – that is affiliated with the Reston Association breaks down as follows: 8,808 townhouses, 5,012 multifamily condominium units, 4,069 multifamily apartments units, and 3,967 single family detached houses. That means that only 18.2% of the housing stock in the Reston Association are single-family detached.

Fourth, with the full opening of the Silver Line, Reston now has the most sought-after office locations in the DMV. Office tenants are seeking close access to Metrorail, to Dulles Airport, good restaurants, great schools, cultural amenities, a range of housing choices, an authentic and vibrant community, and all within minutes of Washington DC – and Reston offers all of that.

Finally, Reston was conceived in the early 1960s not only as a physical community, but one that also followed 7 Planning Principles conceived by Reston’s founder, Robert E. Simon, Jr. These 7 founding principles brought a daring social twist into a large-scale development project, and some of those principles are still challenging today – including the one rather unusual principle that calls for “the focal point of all planning would be on the importance and dignity of the individual.” As the first racially open community in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the integration of social values into planning and development is in Reston’s DNA. This fact alone makes updating the comprehensive plan for Reston both a significant challenge, but also an opportunity.

Note that approval of this comprehensive plan does not mark the end of planning in Reston, and in fact several issues raised by residents will be considered in the SSPA process which has waited patiently for this Reston Comprehensive Plan update to conclude.

The challenges associated with growth in Reston are still very much with us making sure infrastructure keeps up with development, protecting our green spaces, ensuring that new communities within Reston are great and inclusive places to live, work, and play – these challenges are still with us, but adoption of this updated Comprehensive plan will help us not only meet those challenges, but will help Reston thrive and this plan will help achieve the ultimate goal of Reston founder Robert E Simon, Jr – that is the goal of creating true community.