

SEVEN CORNERS VISIONING LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION TASK FORCE

Minutes: November 13, 2012 Meeting

At 7:05 p.m. on November 13, 2012, Co-chair John Thillmann called the meeting to order. Task Force members present were Karl Moritz, Evelyn Haight, Jim McIlvaine, Blake Smith, Jim Edmonson, Randall Pence, Vincent Burke, Patrick Hoar, Paul Byrtus, Devin Corini, and Nathan Bath. Absent due to illness was Co-chair Mary Ellen Ward. Other members absent were Martin Faga, Iqbal Khaiy, Jan Reitman, and Mark Silverwood, who was represented by Jack Reuteman. Fairfax County staff present were Matthew Flis, Revitalization Program Manager of the Office of Community Revitalization (OCR); Aaron Frank, LEED Green Associate, Land Use & Development, Office of Supervisor Penny Gross, Mason District, representing the Task Force's subgroups; Bernard Suchicital of the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ); Kim Rybold, DPZ; Elizabeth Hagg, OCR; Sandy Stallman of the Parks Authority (FCPA); Jay Rauschenbach (FCPA); and Michael Garcia of the Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT). Visitors present were Scott Adams, Mitzi Romiti, Ellie Ashford, Eric Welch, and Suzie Phipps.

Co-chair Thillmann pointed out the work plan he and Co-chair Ward developed in conjunction with County staff that would direct the Task Force's work through June 2013, at which point the Task Force would develop a plan for the remainder of the year. He then invited visitors to offer public comment during the first portion of this meeting. Suzie Phipps, a member of the Bailey's Elementary School PTA, asked the Task Force to consider including in its final recommendations locations for new schools, citing the over-crowding at the Bailey's school as well as other county schools in the Seven Corners area. She said that Bailey's Elementary currently has 350 students over its capacity and that there is a shortage of 1,000 school seats in the Seven Corners area. Eric Welch, a teacher and executive director of Fairfax Leadership Academy, stated that the academy is currently looking for a location on which to build a new school in the Seven Corners area and would like to see the Willston Building continue to be used for children, perhaps as a public charter school, such as a small pilot school for grades 6-12 or 7-12. If the Willston Building cannot be so used, then another location within this general area would be most desirable, he said. Co-chair Thillman directed the County staff to note these comments and said the need for new school locations would likely be considered by the Task Force as it develops land use recommendations.

The Task Force next unanimously approved the minutes of the October 9, 2012 meeting. Following this vote, Mr. Hoar commented that he had checked with Elizabeth D. Teare, Fairfax Deputy County Attorney, on the participation-via-telephone-rule for county meetings. She informed him that task force members would only be permitted to listen to meetings via speaker phone if they are unable to attend in person. However, task force members may not participate in meetings unless they are physically present.

The remainder of the meeting featured presentations by expert staff on issues pertinent to the work of the Task Force. Mr. Flis discussed the Seven Corners area demographics. He noted that the Seven Corners area is much more diverse than Fairfax County as a whole and that minorities constituted the majority of the population. He said that Spanish is the primary language spoken in the area, while English is the second, and pointed out that Asian languages are also spoken by a substantial number of households. Residents also tend to be less educated and earn less than the county as a whole. Members commented on the existing over-crowding in housing. Mr. Flis pointed out that no major population growth is anticipated because of the lack of space available to add housing, but noted this is a topic the Task Force might wish to discuss in the future.

Mr. Suchicital then discussed the current comprehensive plan, including existing plan recommendations and zoning. He provided several handouts, including quantifications of plan development potential, zoning potential and existing development. He discussed how the plan area for Seven Corners is broken into sub-units for organization purposes, and further described each. Mr. Suchicital also stated it was important to recognize that in many cases the current by-right zoning in Seven Corners allows more development than the comprehensive plan recommendations. In reviewing the comprehensive plan, Mr. Suchicital noted that, because parking is one aspect of the area that may stifle future development, it is a subject for which the Task Force may wish to develop recommendations. In studying environmental impact of future development, he noted that the Long Branch Creek green space, an area of 31.15 acres represented in Sub-Unit B-3, is likely to be the only major potential environmental impact feature within the Task Force's consideration.

In speaking of parks, Ms. Stallman and Mr. Rauschenbach explained that, because Seven Corners is the oldest developed area in Fairfax County, no parks were planned within it, a practice typical of its period of development. The only area that might be described as a park is the playing field behind the Willston Multicultural Center, they said. People living and working in the Seven Corners area have access to Arlington and Falls Church parks. They noted that within one mile of Seven Corners are five Falls Church parks and 14 Arlington County Parks, as well as a regional park. Ms. Stallman explained that FCPA does a needs assessment every 10 years to establish park standards and recently added a new standard for urban parkland, which is defined as being less residential but factoring in employees of commercial entities within an area who may want to use park space, a practice common in mixed-use development. She stated that the Seven Corners area is very under-served by parkland but, by adapting existing spaces, such as using schools' outdoor spaces, adding exterior lighting, and installing artificial turf, more land could be made accessible for park usage and may constitute a priority in an urban environment. Ms. Stallman explained the common types of parks that a revitalization process might consider: (1) Pocket Parks, constituting less than one acre of highly populated space; (2) Civic Plazas, larger than one acre and consisting of a high degree of hardscape, which often provide space for urban farmers' markets; (3) Common Greens, similar in size to civic plazas but featuring larger areas of plants and lawn space; and (4) Recreation-Focused parks.

Co-chair Thillman commented that having good design in a project can ensure the development of park space. He also noted that the Task Force should carefully consider mixed-use development since it allows for various types of parks, but, more importantly, it generally diminishes transportation impacts and reduces vehicular trips. He said he would ensure that the Task Force receives ample background in mixed-use development during the course of its work.

Ms. Hagg announced that the December 11th meeting of the Task Force would concentrate on housing in its first hour and transportation in the second.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Evelyn L. Haught
Task Force Secretary

December 11, 2012
Date