

Seven Corners Design Charrette

Meeting Summary and Concepts

June 27, 2013 3:00-8:30pm

The Seven Corners Design Charrette began with introductory remarks from Mason District Supervisor Penny Gross welcoming the participants and explaining the need for the Task Force and community to work together to develop concepts for the future of Seven Corners. She explained that the ideas developed at the charrette are preliminary and that the plans will be refined as the process continues but that ultimately the Task Force will develop recommendations for changes to the County's Comprehensive Plan. Supervisor Gross described the charrette exercises and defined the three opportunity sites selected for potential for redevelopment in the future. Finally, she asked the group to not focus on transportation issues because there will be another opportunity to evaluate them this fall after the results of the Phase I Transportation Analysis are available.

INTRODUCTION

County staff member JoAnne Fiebe provided an overview of the Design Charrette. She introduced participants representing various groups, explained the goals, and reviewed the agenda and ground rules. JoAnne explained that the Draft Guiding Principles discussed at a previous Task Force meeting would help guide decisions during the charrette and will be used as a tool to test ideas against. She then presented a series of images that visually described each of the major concepts proposed the Draft Guiding Principles so that participants would gain a better understanding of how the principles might translate to physical changes in the area.

EXERCISE I: FRAMEWORK PLAN

The three charrette teams were instructed to answer a series of questions on multimodal connectivity, land use, and urban design for the entire Seven Corners area. Responses to these questions were drawn on maps. The purpose of this exercise was to establish an overall concept framework used to guide further discussions on the opportunity sites.

At the end of the exercise, teams pinned up their concept maps for review and discussion by all participants. Staff and participants first acknowledged common themes across all three concepts and then identified unique ideas from individual groups.

Common Themes

- Lateral connectivity is needed across both sides of Arlington Blvd (Route 50) to unite the different parts of Seven Corners
- The primary activity center should be the Willston Site
- Connect to Regional Park (Upton Hill)
- Leesburg Pike (Route 7) should be a complete street with buildings closer to and facing the street. It should act as a "Main Street" with higher quality streetscape
- A range of different sized common areas are needed to encourage a variety of public uses
- Increase density on the Seven Corners Shopping Center site and at the town center on the Willston Site

- Safe multimodal crossings are needed for Leesburg Pike (Route 7)
- Connect Seven Corners to the East Falls Church Metro Station via Roosevelt Blvd with enhanced transit/bicycle infrastructure
- The transit center can move locations (as long as it stays in the Study Area) and a second hub could be added if needed for demand. Increased, efficient connections are needed to Metro. This should include Fairfax Connector service from the area to Metro

Questions

- What options are available to make connections across Route 50?
- What level of additional density is adequate to spur new development but balance infrastructure demands? Is doubling the current density enough or will tripling existing levels be needed.

EXERCISE II: OPPORTUNITY SITE

1. Willston Area/Apartments
2. Seven Corners Shopping Center
3. Sears Site/Medical Offices

Each team was provided maps and information for one opportunity site and asked produce a minimum of two drawings – a conceptual master plan with the number of building stories for each block and a street section. They were told to use the concepts presented in the framework plan exercise to assist in organizing ideas for the plan and section. Before beginning the design, team members were asked to write down 3-5 ideas for the site. Ideas were vetted by the team and then drawn by the facilitators.

(Below are the ideas written by group members prior to the design of the opportunity sites and not yet vetted by the group):

Group 1: Individual Ideas; Willston Area/Apartments

- Redevelop residential areas with five-story podium and some retail on a grid
- Higher density residential
- Mix of uses: residential, retail, parks, cultural center
- Texas donut wrapped construction with recreation amenities on parking deck
- Connectivity & pedestrian friendly design
- Introduce green spaces even if very small
- Inside of Patrick Henry Drive Loop (Horseshoe) include county building and mixed-use retail/residential on grid
- Create a main street in Willston
- Redevelop Willston I with multicultural center
- Construct with attention to diversity in amenities
- Improve streetscape - trees, benches, green panels, lighting
- Resolution of orphan parking lot
- Add open spaces: small parks/plazas, recreational soccer roof
- Make connections by improving the grid and the pedestrian/bike network

- Connection across route 50

Group 2: Individual Ideas; Seven Corners Shopping Center

- Structured parking - underground or aboveground
- Multimodal choices along Route 7
- More public transportation to ease traffic
- Multi story heights to 100-feet
- High density: Four FAR
- Smaller buildings than now. Mix of heights to 12 stories
- Mixed use retail/hotel/residential
- Higher density mixed use
- Separate roads at the Seven Corners intersection
- Visually integrate center with surrounding roads (Route 50 & Route 7)
- Interconnectivity between the different land uses in the site and to neighboring amenities
- (2) Mixed income housing
- Use west side as a link to Roosevelt Boulevard
- Assume at least one street crossing over Route 50
- School of excellence (magnet school)
- Route 7 should have building lining the street

Parking Lot:

- Circulator bus within Seven Corners and to Metro Station
- Park requirements (i.e. Tysons)
- Remember that high-rise buildings may not be financially feasible
- Need to consider right-of-way taking. How much land will be lost?
- Need to imagine phasing
- No forced uses (i.e. No minimum amount of a particular use)
- Consider long term potential for land owners

Group 3: Individual Ideas; Sears Site/Medical Offices

- Need bigger roads/more access roads on Route 50 and Route 7
- Need density for residential. Mix of low-rise, high-rise and commercial office
- More recreational space district wide
- Bring buildings up to Route 7 with great streetscape
- Medical sites should be small scale commercial retail/office without anchors
- Sears site needs access to Seven Corners Shopping Center
- Density should taper towards single family homes providing buffer from taller buildings facing Route 7
- Need more affordable housing
- Need more mid-high rise residential
- MOMs Organic Market grocery store
- Route 7 street side should have retail and offices with residential in the back
- Townhouses in back growing to 4-5 stories at Route 7

At the end of the exercise, teams pinned up their master plans and sections for review and discussion by all participants. Below are the final concepts presented by the teams to all participants:

Group 1 Major Concepts: Willston Area/Apartments

- Office sites should be options in the plan
- The Fairfax County Park Authority supports access to Upton Hill Regional Park and adding additional park land in this area. Having a dual use cultural/park space is also supported
- Need to confirm viability of additional housing and retail. May be more than market demand
- The bones are there for a new town center – just need incentives
- Is additional density adequate at two to three times the current intensity?

Group 2 Major Concepts: Seven Corners Shopping Center

- Accommodate big box retail
- How would parking be incorporated? Options may include podiums, structured or building into the existing grade.
- What level of density is appropriate – two times the current intensity?
- A cross street concept to the transit center should be considered. The plan should also include future options for higher density at big box sites (Vince Burke)
- Do not have parks surrounded by roads
- Ultimately the transit center may need to be near possible future bridges crossing Arlington Boulevard or part of the Roosevelt Boulevard connection to the Metro Station.

Group 3 Major Concepts: Sears Site/Medical Offices

- Some changes in the roadway network should be considered. For example, Juniper Lane near the Sears site should cut left or right and egress at a light on Leesburg Pike. Would need to see if the neighborhood would accept this option.
- Eliminate service drives. Traffic lights are confusing and service drives exacerbate the problem
- Create multiple connections to new park space
- Is mixed use viable or retain single use retail?