

John Thillmann, Chairman, and Members
Seven Corners Revitalization Task Force
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VIA EMAIL

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Dear Chairman Thillman and Members of the Seven Corners Revitalization Task Force,

As you continue your consideration of changes to the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan for the Seven Corners area, we are writing on behalf of the undersigned Seven Corners neighborhood associations to reiterate both our thanks for your work, and our recommendations. As Seven Corners neighborhoods, we will be directly and disproportionately affected by the redevelopment under consideration. As you could see from the number of people who attended the Task Force's last public comment session on June 23rd, there is a great deal of interest in, and a great deal of concern about, the plan under consideration.

We understand that in order to make it economically viable for current property owners to bring upgraded amenities and improved retail options to the area, higher density will be required. The vision for a walkable, bikeable, "village" atmosphere with trees, bike lanes, and outdoor dining space is attractive. Within the context of that larger vision, we would like to offer the following observations and recommendations.

- 1) *The Comprehensive Plan amendments should make it clear that transportation improvements must come before added density.*

We appreciate the comments made on June 23rd describing the severity of traffic issues through Seven Corners on the Rte. 7 and on Rte. 50 corridors, and the acknowledgement that, even in the absence of redevelopment in our neighborhood, the congestion and delays in our area will only increase unless significant changes to the road system are made. While some of our neighborhoods have specific questions about the traffic plan presented on the 23rd, in general we are strongly supportive of an approach that allows local traffic to avoid major thoroughfares while moving around the local area, and facilitates the smoother flow, off local streets, of traffic that is passing through. The plans for fly-overs, local boulevards, including walking and biking options, are appealing. They are also expensive. The competition for county, state and federal resources for transportation improvements is significant, and the timeline for actualizing transportation improvements in the Seven Corners area is uncertain.

We appreciate the comments by Fairfax County officials at the meeting on June 23rd that acknowledge the importance of carrying out transportation infrastructure improvements before significant density is added. It was observed at the June and July Task Force meetings that other Northern Virginia counties, including Alexandria, have added teeth to this sentiment by including an implementation section to their Comprehensive Plan amendments. The implementation section makes it clear that redevelopment is to be staged, and that higher density should not move forward absent the planning, funding, and permitting of transportation improvements. One important advantage of this approach is that it makes neighborhoods, owner/developers, and County officials allies in securing transportation funding, as their interests are all aligned in bringing traffic improvements to the area as quickly as possible. We were disappointed that, in the interest of “flexibility,” the Task Force rejected this approach and instead decided to add a couple of sentences to the existing transportation section of the recommendations.

We strongly recommend that the Task Force include in its recommendations language that makes it clear that actual transportation improvements must be funded or completed before higher density redevelopment will be approved. We urge that you consider prioritizing improvements that do not require approval by the City of Falls Church or Arlington County, including:

- the new 4-way intersection at Seven Corners for Sleepy Hollow Road, Wilson Boulevard and Leesburg Pike
- the proposed over-crossing between Castle Rd and Roosevelt Road, which should be designed to circumvent the existing shopping center in order to expedite construction
- the proposed over-crossing from Castle Place to Hillwood Avenue
- improved access to Rte 50.

2) *Protect adjacent neighborhoods by limiting ingress and egress to the Leesburg Pike Village Opportunity Area and in the transitional areas on the south side of Leesburg Pike to Route 7 only.*

Juniper Lane, Shadeland Drive, Buffalo Ridge Road and Patrick Henry Drive should be protected from vehicular access from the new development, and from vehicle traffic and parking from non-residents who may want to walk to new retail outlets. We specifically recommend that, in the event of development, the top of Juniper Lane be closed to all traffic, in order to prevent any possibility of vehicle traffic to and from new development to cut through our neighborhoods. Because Patrick Henry will likely have more traffic off of Route 7 even if there is no direct access from the new development, plans should be made to monitor traffic volume and speed, and traffic calming measures should be planned for implementation as needed. The Comprehensive Plan amendments should protect all of the established neighborhoods from further retail encroachment and cut-through traffic.

- 3) Recommended density should be consistent with other successful redevelopment projects that are more than a mile from Metro and do not have direct access to major highways. In particular, the Leesburg Pike Village Opportunity Area (the Sears site) should be designated for mixed use – commercial, retail and residential – with a total density that does not exceed the levels developed in the charrette process.

Several of our neighborhood associations are concerned by what appear to be very high levels of density proposed for Seven Corners. Unlike Shirlington, the Mosaic District, Reston, Tysons, and multiple other nearby Northern Virginia areas where higher density is being proposed or built, Seven Corners does not have quick and easy access to highways such as 495, 395, or Route 66. It is also not walking distance to Metro, which is 1.4 miles away from the proposed Seven Corners Town Center. (The Fairfax County Planning Commission's Transit Oriented Development Committee's walking distance research defines walking distance as .25-.5 miles.) This lack of easy access to Metro and highways must be taken into consideration when density levels are established for the revitalized Seven Corners area.

The numbers presented in the charrette recommend total density that is nearly double the comparable figures for recent Fairfax County developments less than one mile from Metro, with recommendations for residential density that are two and a half to three times the density for other Metro-accessible development projects. Quite simply, this is too high to be written into the Comprehensive Plan, even if the envisioned transportation improvements are carried out. This is particularly true because whatever goes into the Comprehensive Plan will become the floor, not the ceiling, for allowable density, and land owners/developers may apply for waivers on a property-by-property basis to increase the density approved in the Comprehensive Plan.

Mason District already has the highest density per square acre and the highest density per square mile in Fairfax County. The Seven Corners redevelopment area is a total of 77 acres, for which the Task Force charrette recommendations are 5.9 million square feet of residential space (5,820 units) and 7.7 million square feet total redevelopment. This is substantially more dense than

other nearby redevelopment projects, including projects with significantly better access to regional transportation than the Seven Corners site (see comparison chart, below).

	Transpo Options	Acres	Res Sq Ft	X	Tot Sq Ft	X	ResUnits	X
7 Corners (All)	Rtes 50, 7, 66	77	5,930,000		7,651,000		5,820	
> 1 Mile From Metro								
Shirlington	395	27	1,033,000		1,907,832		1,033	
<i>Adjust 285%</i>		77	2,945,963	2	5,437,321	1.4	2,944	2
Fairfax Corner	66, 50, FC Pkwy	36	400,000		835,000		400	
<i>Adjust 214%</i>		77	855,556	6.9	1,786,900	4.3	856	6.8
<1 Mile From Metro								
Springfield Town Center	95, 495, .4 mi to Metro	80	2,370,000		5,470,000		2,180	
<i>Adjust 96%</i>		77	2,281,000	2.6	5,264,000	1.5	2,098	2.8
Reston Town Center	267, FC Pkwy, .4 mi to Metro	84	1,998,000		4,438,592		1,998	
<i>Adjust 91%</i>		77	1,831,566	3.2	4,068,857	1.9	1,832	3.2
Mosaic District	495, 66, HOT lanes, 50, 29, less than 1 mi to Metro	32	1,061,000		1,751,000		1,100	
<i>Adjust 240%</i>		77	2,546,400	2.3	4,202,400	1.8	2,640	2.2

For example, the Seven Corners acreage is three and a half times the size of the new residential, commercial and retail development at Shirlington. Even though Shirlington has direct access to 395, the charrette recommendations for Seven Corners are, proportionally, double the residential square feet per acre in Shirlington; forty percent more total square feet per acre; and double the number of residential units per acre. It is unclear to us why Seven Corners needs to be twice as dense – over triple the acreage – in order to be developed into an economically viable and successful town center.

The charrette numbers for Seven Corners call for quadruple the total square footage per acre, and nearly seven times the residential square footage and units per

acre, of Fairfax Corner, the other Fairfax County development that is more than a mile from Metro and is more than two miles to the nearest unrestricted access to a major highway. The charrette numbers are double the total density, and triple the residential square footage, of Reston Town Center, which will soon have a Metro stop.

- 4) Plans for Seven Corners redevelopment, particularly redevelopment with disproportionately high residential density, must include plans for schools with Mason District-appropriate estimates for numbers of school children. This should be an integral part of the Comprehensive Plan amendments from the outset.

Current projections for the numbers of children who will live in the re-developed areas and attend public schools are based on Fairfax County-wide averages, which are not appropriate for Mason District. We know that, empirically, Mason District has larger numbers of school age children than other parts of the county. Already, Mason District elementary, middle and high schools are crowded, and added density – particularly disproportionate residential density – will exacerbate this problem. The result is poor outcomes for children, poor performance for schools, and reduced property values for homeowners. Schools are a critical part of the infrastructure of a liveable community, and appropriate estimates and provisions for expansion should be included in the Task Force’s vision and recommendations.

- 5) Plans for Seven Corners redevelopment should provide for adequate retail amenities to serve the neighborhoods and incent walking. The Task Force should maintain its approach of making recommendations for residential, retail and commercial square footage, and should guard against overweighting residential development at the expense of community-serving retail.

At the July Task Force meeting, a proposal was floated to change the approach and allow flexibility among residential, commercial and retail square footage. While we appreciate the need for flexibility in a forty-year plan, we are deeply concerned that, in a long-term vision, appropriate balance be maintained between adding additional residential units and providing retail amenities to serve existing neighborhoods and new neighbors. Already, compared to other redevelopment in the area, the charrette recommendations appear to be disproportionately weighted to residential square footage. Keeping in mind that individual waivers may be applied for by property owners, we believe that the forty-year vision for growth be more balanced among residential, retail and commercial development. For that reason, we recommend that the Task Force maintain its approach of recommending square footage for each category of development, and urge the Task Force to balance residential, commercial and retail in its recommendations.

- 6) Task Force recommendations should take into consideration environmental concerns, including adequate provisions to prevent flooding, runoff, pollution, and promote green space and tree cover.

During the public comment period at the June Task Force hearing, neighbors spoke compellingly about constant flooding issues in multiple Seven Corners neighborhoods; about pollution and runoff into Lake Barcroft; and the need for environmentally friendly, property-enhancing tree cover and green space needed to create pleasant, liveable communities. We reiterate these concerns and appreciate the Task Force's work to incorporate additional language regarding these environmental concerns.

Thank you again for the work you are doing to improve the quality of life for all of us who live in the Seven Corners area, and for those who may live here in the future. We look forward to working with you to address these concerns, and to develop an exciting and workable vision and plan for future redevelopment. The neighborhoods listed on this joint letter are overwhelmingly in favor of revitalization and we look forward to working with you to make the vision of Seven Corners a reality.

Sincerely,

George Fitchko, Acting President
Buffalo Hill Neighborhood Association

John Iekel, President
Ravenwood Park Citizens Association

Jim Kilbourne, President
Lake Barcroft Association

Catriona McCormack, President
Ravenwood Neighborhood Association

Duane Morse, Chairman, Seven Corners Redevelopment Committee
Sleepy Hollow Manor Citizens Association