

**Minutes of the Seven Corners Transportation and Land Use Task Force Meeting
August 06, 2013**

Meeting called to order at 7:05 PM
Mason District Government Center

Attendance:

Task Force: John Thillmann, Evelyn Haught, Paul Byrtus, Jim Edmondson, Mark Silverwood, Jim McIlvaine, Karl Moritz, Martin Faga, Pat Hoar, and Vince Burke.

Staff: JoAnne Fiebe (OCR), Timothy Maher (OCR), Bernie Suchicital (DPZ), Mike Garcia (FCDOT), Kris Morley-Nikfar (FCDOT), Jay Rauschenbach (Park Authority)

The meeting was called to order several minutes after 7 pm to allow additional members of the Task Force and public to arrive. Once the meeting was called to order, Mr. Thillmann reported on administrative items. The Minutes of the July 11, 2013 meeting were approved unanimously.

Mr. Thillmann opened the floor for a public comment period. JoAnne Fiebe brought to the attention of the Task Force a phone call OCR received from area resident Mr. Randazzo earlier that day. Mr. Randazzo expressed concern that the increase in development intensity resulting from the charrette would negatively impact traffic congestion in the area and that any increase in development must first be met with a solution to ongoing transportation concerns. JoAnne responded that a study to find solutions to traffic problems was ongoing and would be developed concurrently with any land use proposals for the area.

No other public comments were made.

Mr. Thillmann introduced the structure of the evening's meeting. County staff would present the combined results of the two charrette exercises; the public and landowners would then be given a chance to make comments.

JoAnne Fiebe presented the combined results of the first charrette exercise – the framework plan. The purpose of this plan is to integrate the major themes explored by each of the three charrette groups. The framework plan included concepts that were:

- shared by two or more of the charrette groups
- developed by a single group but given an overall positive response during the charrette discussion period

Ideas presented in the framework plan include:

- The primary activity node for the study area should be near the current location of the Willston Center, with a secondary activity node on the site of the current Seven Corners Shopping Center
- Increased connectivity is desired across a north-south axis between Leesburg Pike, Arlington Boulevard, and Wilson Boulevard. Increased connectivity to Roosevelt Blvd. (in the direction of the East Falls Church Metro station) is also important
- Multiple gateways to the area exist and should be expressed, especially along Leesburg Pike, Arlington Boulevard and Wilson Boulevard
- Increased residential and mixed-use land uses are desired in many locations

- Leesburg Pike is primarily seen as having a neighborhood character with high quality transit
- Arlington Boulevard is primarily seen as being a thoroughfare for through traffic
- Grids of streets are recommended for the Willston Center and Seven Corners Shopping Center sites
- Increased bike and pedestrian connectivity are desired throughout the study area

Tim Maher presented the combined results of the second charrette exercise – the land use block development plans. His presentation explored the connections between the four opportunity sites and how each site relates to the community as a whole.

The ideas presented in the block development plan include:

- The Willston Center site would act as a mixed-use activity center, with a tree-lined ‘Main Street.’ Buildings would have ground-floor retail with residential development above. Additional space would be available for office use as well as a public park with access to some form of cultural/arts space. The portions of the area north of Willston Drive would remain residential, but density would be increased three-fold. Space was reserved for an extension of Upton Hill Park, possibly for an athletic field.
- The current Seven Corners Shopping Center also would act as a mixed-use activity center, with a grid of streets lined primarily with ground-floor retail. Buildings would have residential units above the retail. Two bridges over Arlington Boulevard would connect this site with the Willston Center site. The eastern side of this site would host ‘big box’ retail sites, while the western side would host an 8-15 story residential tower. An open space park/plaza would be reserved for the center of the site. This mixed-use activity center would be accessed from both Arlington Boulevard and Leesburg Pike.
- The Sears site would be redeveloped with two 5-6 story buildings of either residential or office use above ground-floor retail. Intensity would be highest along Leesburg Pike and then taper off to three-story townhouses in the rear. A green-space buffer would extend between the townhouses and existing residential structures adjacent to the rear of the site, and Leesburg Pike would be tree-lined. The existing connection from these residential areas to Leesburg Pike, Juniper Lane, would be redirected to a stop light to ease traffic concerns.
- The Medical offices site nearest the Seven Corners interchange would primarily be used as office/retail with some space reserved for additional residential uses.

Following the two presentations by OCR, landowners with property within the Seven Corners Study Area were asked to take the floor and share their comments with the group.

Mark Silverwood, discussing Westover 305 LLC properties, generally liked the overall plan and had few issues. Mr. Silverwood expressed concern about the limited amount of retail space at the Willston Center site and commented that segregating the retail elements on opposite ends of the “Main Street” may not set up conditions in which retail can thrive. He added that stores that locate in these areas will need thousands of customers a day and must draw from outside the community, unless considerably more density is included. He also indicated he would not want to see a repeat of mandatory street-level retail as implemented in Arlington County. Lastly, Mr. Silverwood indicated that approximately 3.5-4 times the density would be necessary to consider redevelopment of these properties. All Affordable Dwelling Units (ADUs) on his property would need to be replaced.

Jim Edmondson, discussing Seven Corners Apartments, LLC properties, provided a handout of his comments. Mr. Edmondson expressed a strong concern that the current plan is not realistic because the apartments to the northeast of the Willston Center turn a considerable profit in their current operation. A large increase in density and a significant increase in value over basic selling price would be necessary for any redevelopment to be considered. He does not recommend a park for this site because it would not add to the profit margin of current owners. Mr. Edmondson indicated that a minimum of 800 units in cost-efficient buildings would be necessary. Many of the units currently located on the property are low-income (though not part of a Low-Income Housing Tax Credit deal) and any increase in density should take this into account to avoid wholesale displacement. Mr. Edmondson also stated that the transit conditions for the Seven Corners Study Area must be significantly improved in order to raise asking rent prices. Any plan that does not take into account realistic economics or incentives is not feasible, he noted, especially in the near term. He added that he represented the property's owner, a Chinese businessman, whom he knew to be reluctant to redevelop this property in the near future.

Vincent Burke, discussing Seven Corners Shopping Center on behalf of the B.F. Saul Co., had a generally optimistic view of the overall plan and presented a site plan of a Seven Corners Town Center prepared by the architectural firm Cooper Carry. However, Mr. Burke expressed concern at the suggestion of new bridge connections over Arlington Boulevard, because these connections may take up too much valuable land and negatively impact retail uses at or near the bridges. Mr. Burke explained that the Seven Corners Shopping Center is currently thriving and it will be hard to redevelop short of high-rise construction. He explained that the successful Potomac Yards development required approximately 10x the existing density to redevelop. Mr. Burke also stressed the importance of maintaining some 'big box' retail on the site and encouraged a multi-modal transit center to promote better connections to the surrounding area.

The Cooper Carry plan provides slightly more retail than currently exists on the site, while adding a lot of new residential units. Most buildings would have ground-floor retail with up to five floors of residential development above. Space was provided for some hotel and office uses as well. Primary entrances to the site were from Arlington Boulevard and Leesburg Pike.

Jim McIlvaine (discussing the Sears site) expressed concern that the Sears site and surrounding properties may not be ready for redevelopment in the near future. The properties are owned by three separate entities and parcel assembly will be difficult. The office buildings on the site are fully leased and have been recently renovated. The Sears building has up to a 50 year lease and is a middle-range sales performer, making it unlikely as a redevelopment opportunity in coming years. Ultimately, Mr. McIlvaine felt the Seven Corners planning effort would need to increase density and property values dramatically before redevelopment is a realistic proposal. County staff asked Mr. McIlvaine about a 2009 APR nomination for the Sears site of which he was unaware.

Task Force members from Regency were not in attendance at the meeting to discuss the First Washington Realty, LLC properties that make up the Willston I Shopping Center.

Mr. Thillmann then opened the floor for general comments and questions from Task Force members. Evelyn Haught asked to what extent the missing transit options could cause the Seven Corners Study Area to stagnate. Jim Edmondson expressed the idea that the Study Area is in competition with many other sub-markets and is currently not measuring up to them. John

Thillmann replied that the added density of the plan will attract people and interest to the Study Area. Some risk now will create stronger opportunities in the near term. He also shared that in a meeting with the Planning Director of Falls Church, there is a major effort by the city to make a connection from the Seven Corners Study Area to the Metro station along Roosevelt Blvd. Patrick Hoar asked how much density can be added to the Seven Corners Study Area based on the current plan/zoning for the area. County staff promised to tally the numbers to present at the next Task Force meeting.

In closing, Mr. Thillmann expressed optimism that some sites in the Seven Corners Study Area will be ready to redevelop soon, specifically pointing out the 35 acres around the Willston Center site and the 35 acres of the Seven Corners Shopping Center. The Task Force's goal will be to take the plan to the Board of Supervisors in October 2014, which means that plan language would need to be finalized in May or June of that same year. He noted that the September, November, and December 2013 meetings will be important for figuring out transportation issues in the Study Area.

The next Task Force meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 10, 2013 at 7:00 PM at the Mason District Government Center. There is no Task Force meeting scheduled for the month of October, 2013. The Task Force adjourned at 8:48 pm.

By Evelyn Haught
Secretary

Date