

June 2014

**Sleepy Hollow Manor Citizens Association**

John Thillmann, Chairman  
Seven Corners Land Use and Transportation Task Force

Dear Chairman Thillmann:

Our Citizens Association wants to thank to you and your entire Task Force for its work on planning the revitalization of the Seven Corner Area. We appreciate the dedication of the Task Force members and the Fairfax County staff in their efforts to delineate a vision for future development in the Seven Corner Community Business Center. We support the general vision. This area is our home and we will be greatly affected by the future development of Seven Corners.

Our neighborhood consists of approximately 255 homes and borders directly south and west of Land Unit C (current Sears property and adjacent commercial building) and Land Unit G-4 (the new vertical Upper Bailey's Elementary School building). The Sleepy Hollow Manor Citizens Association was created in 1957 and pre-dates the development of the Lord and Taylor shopping center (now Sears) in 1965.

One of the homeowners in our community and member of our community association has been attending Task Force meetings and reporting back to the citizens association since it began in 2012. Several other homeowners and community association members have been attending Task Force meetings regularly over the past nine months. As a community, we are engaged and informed and we are very happy to be able to contribute our recommendations to you in the form of this letter.

As a community, Sleepy Hollow Manor largely echoes the concerns expressed in letters sent to the Task Force and community leaders by our adjacent neighborhood associations of Ravenwood, Ravenwood Park, and Sleepy Hollow.

Our first five comments address the overall plan, while our last three concerns are specific to our neighborhood.

*1) Add a Public Comment Meeting once the **Entire** Task Force Plan (including the critical Transportation section) is complete and made available to the public.*

At the most recent Task Force meeting on June 10, county staff presented a timeline for specific meetings leading up to consideration of the Task Force Plan by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors in November 2014. We have a serious concern that this final public comment meeting on June 23 comes before the full plan is available to the public. In order to effectively evaluate the plan and make informed comments to the Task Force, as well as to the Board of Supervisors, Sleepy Hollow Manor strongly requests that all the components be made public, in advance of the Board of Supervisor's meeting. In order to make informed decisions and know what the full impact will be on our community, we strongly request that we have access to the Transportation infrastructure section at the soonest possible date, and several months in advance of the Board of Supervisors meeting on the subject. The Transportation component represents a critical infrastructure piece, absolutely essential to support any increased density in this already very problematic traffic area.

*2) Provide additional supporting details on proposed Redevelopment Option densities in order for neighboring communities to make informed judgments.*

We have a general concern about the proposed density detailed in the Plan given the fact that Seven Corners CBC site is greater than one mile from the nearest Metro station. Although we can appreciate the desire to "Emphasize Form instead of Floor Area Ratio" (Page 8) and the use of square footage numbers for the Redevelopment Option in Figure 26 (Page 9), it would be helpful to also include traditional measures (i.e., equivalent FAR, dwelling units per acre). In order to make comparisons against base development and similar developments in Fairfax County, we strongly request that you add these traditional measures to the Plan. This would allow community citizens to judge the proposed density figures and provide meaningful feedback as to its appropriateness. In addition, we also strongly request that you provide any relevant examples of similar density redevelopment in Fairfax County, occurring at comparable distance from Metro stations to help our community make informed decisions about the nature of the proposed density of this plan.

The Redevelopment Option looks to be greater than 10 times the current residential development density, while the proposed redevelopment density for non-residential use seems to increase less than two (2) times. The Residential square footage to Non-residential square footage ratio reflected in Figure 26 is ~3.5/1. Is this ratio commensurate with mixed-use ("work/live/play") developments in Fairfax County and consistent with the stated desire "to create a place where people can live and work and minimize their dependence on the automobile"? Are the contemplated office space numbers adequate to minimize dependence on automobiles? Can this desire to reduce dependence on automobiles occur without easy access to the Metro?

*3) Provide additional details and more specific criteria for evaluating the appropriateness of redevelopment proposals for individual CBC Land units or sub-units in the Plan.*

While it may not be the role of the Task Force to specify how the redevelopment plan is to be implemented, the plan can and should provide more guidance to property owners, County regulators, and interested neighbors/citizens about how they should approach the implementation process (rezoning application, permits, construction).

The Redevelopment Option would permit the property owner to redevelop those properties with taller buildings, greater density, and different uses than are currently permitted. In exchange, each property owner would need to offer "certain uses, facilities, or other elements which are deemed appropriate to implement the vision for Seven Corners." (pages 10-11). These uses, facilities and other elements include, but are not limited to, the eight categories listed on page 11 of the Plan.

As currently written, however, the Plan provides little meaningful guidance about what is actually to be required under each of the development options. For example, the Plan states that: "The area wide recommendations for Urban Design, Transportation, Public Parks and other guidance are generally applicable to the base development option" (page 10). Yet urban design, transportation and public parks are among the eight categories "deemed appropriate to implement the vision for Seven Corners" under the Redevelopment Option. This conflicting language makes it very difficult to understand, even generally, how redevelopment proposals are to be evaluated.

These implementation criteria are key to the success of the redevelopment process. The Task Force is establishing a mechanism that relies on the County staff to ensure not only that proposed new buildings and uses fit within the height and maximum-square-footage and use limitations set forth in the plan, but that redevelopment proceeds in a coherent fashion and that the amenities contemplated by the plan actually materialize. Without better guidance from the Task Force, the staff is likely to be confronted with arguments that any redevelopment proposal that does not exceed those limits is permissible. We are confident this is not what the Task Force has in mind, and we strongly urge the Task Force to say so explicitly in the final version of its redevelopment plan to clarify the intention of the plan.

*4) Augment the Task Force Plan with details regarding Implementation phasing and more specific criteria for assessing proposed redevelopment for Seven Corners CBC Land Units or sub-units in the context of **timely Transportation improvements.***

While the pace of redevelopment will be driven by economic factors such as expiring leases, interest rates and availability of financing, consideration needs to be given to how the timing of a particular proposal fits into the overall redevelopment process. As the Task Force is well aware, our area suffers from an outmoded and overburdened transportation network that is already struggling to handle the existing traffic flow. While the final version of the plan will include specific recommendations to address that problem, implementing those recommendations is likely to take years, and to occur in phases rather than all at once. The Plan contemplates roughly 5,000 additional residential units for the redevelopment area, plus increased traffic from outside visitors to the new town center. Unless improvements to the transportation network keep pace with redevelopment, gridlock will ensue and everyone – existing residents, newcomers, visitors, and the businesses that serve them – will suffer. The final version of the plan should make clear that the status of improvements to the transportation system is a critical factor to be considered in deciding whether and when to approve redevelopment proposals that otherwise conform to the Plan.

We understand the need for flexibility, especially in light of the long-term and cooperative nature of the redevelopment process, but we believe the plan should spell out in much greater detail the factors the Task Force expects the staff to take into consideration in evaluating redevelopment proposals. We are concerned that the detailed figures in the Redevelopment options for the Opportunity Areas in Figure 26 (page 9) will be used as justification to gain acceptance for rezoning applications without proper consideration for the other elements of the Plan (e.g., Transportation improvements). These Transportation improvements are essential to support any increase in density and will require coordination/collaboration that extend well beyond the owners in the three Opportunity Areas. They will involve other owners in the Seven Corners CBC that have not been fully participating in the Task Force planning, as well as other jurisdictions beyond Fairfax County (e.g., Falls Church and Arlington County). As such, they could easily be out-paced by redevelopment on individual land parcels.

We strongly request that additional language is inserted into the Plan that will specifically address the necessity or even a requirement to tie approval of proposed rezoning applications to commensurate improvements in critical supporting infrastructure (especially Transportation improvements) to support any increased density. The current Task Force Plan has language on page 13 for "Alternative Land Uses" which are uses beyond those specifically recommended in the Plan. That language states: "When an alternative land use can be demonstrated to be supportive of the desired urban form and compatible with the surrounding development and when the Plan's transportation needs, pedestrian orientation, and other urban design aspects called for in the Plan are adequately addressed, such uses may be considered." We encourage inclusion of similar language and details in the Task Force Plan that speaks directly to the necessity for supporting infrastructure (especially Transportation improvements) to be demonstrated and considered as part of any specific rezoning and permit applications associated with the Redevelopment Option for a CBC Land Unit or sub-unit.

*5) Plan and Account for projected impact on already overcrowded schools in the Seven Corners and neighboring areas*

We understand that the Task Force has not studied the impact that adding more than 5,000 new residential units to the Seven Corners area will have on our schools. We also recognize the difficulty in doing so as part of this visioning process, particularly given the uncertain timing of redevelopment and the fact that enrollment levels at local schools can vary over time. However our experience with overcrowded schools is very real and growing worse. The stopgap solution to the overcrowding at Bailey's Elementary took almost a decade to implement. Overcrowding extends to almost all the schools in the surrounding area, including the local middle (Glasgow) and high school (Stuart). There are no easy solutions for additional school space. Additional density in Seven Corners could only exacerbate an already untenable situation. The Task Force must make clear that it expects the potential impact on schools to be evaluated when a particular redevelopment proposal is being reviewed. Any school impacts must be identified and remediating plans developed as part of approving any development that increases density in our community.

**Comments specific to Sleepy Hollow Manor:**

*6) Maintain the established cul-de-sac on Shadeland drive.*

The Shadeland Drive cul-de-sac is not, and has never been, included in the Seven Corners Community Business District. Ensure that the Task Force Plan, including drawings and figures (specifically Figures 24, 25, 27, and 29) accurately reflect this fact. The current figures are vague or worse and should not be construed as any implicit agreement to remove/annex the cul-de-sac or change its configuration. The utility and existence of these neighborhood cul-de-sacs are consistent with Fairfax County Public Facilities Manual Section 7-0406.8 providing for cul-de-sacs "at the end of all dead-end streets".

*7) Maintain the existing buffering between Seven Corners CBC development and the established neighborhood of stable residential properties in Sleepy Hollow Manor.*

It is critical to point out that our community pre-dates the major commercial development in Seven Corners. During the commercial development of the Lord and Taylor shopping center (now Sears) in 1965, the developers/owners (Jim McIlvaine) coordinated with residential property owners in Sleepy Hollow Manor on

appropriate screening between the development and the neighborhood residents. That buffer has served our neighborhood and the commercial property owners well for almost 50 years.

Sleepy Hollow Manor requests that the Task Force plan provides language on keeping the purpose and quality of such a buffer between our neighborhood and the possible redevelopment of Land Unit C (Sears and adjoining commercial property).

*8) Delete specific references in the Task Force plan to the possibility of opening cut-throughs between our neighborhood and the high-density development properties envisioned for Land Unit C (Sears and adjoining commercial property) and Land Unit G-4 (the new vertical Upper Bailey's Elementary school building)*

One page 30, Figure 29, a blue arrow indicates a "Major Pedestrian Connection" that extends through the Shadeland Drive cul-de-sac into the Sleepy Hollow Manor neighborhood. Given the proximity to the new Upper Bailey's Elementary School and the current traffic congestion on Leesburg Pike, we are concerned that creating such a cut-through into our neighborhood before CBC redevelopment is well underway could (1) turn our neighborhood into a parking lot for Upper Bailey's teachers and families, and for residents/visitors of the proposed high-density multi-family dwelling units on the Sears parcel; (2) increase the likelihood of crime in our neighborhood; and (3) increase the traffic in our neighborhood, all without any offsetting benefit to our residents.

While such a connection might make sense at some point in the future, Sleepy Hollow Manor strongly requests that this feature be removed of the current plan.

Thank you again for your collective efforts and for the opportunity to comment on the Plan. We look forward to our continued work together, and the opportunity to review the transportation and urban planning sections when they are available and to provide comments to the Task Force.