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**Seven Corners Plan, Sears Site and the Future of Fairfax**

**Comments by Stewart Schwartz, Executive Director**

The Coalition for Smarter Growth is an 18-year-old non-profit, founded by the region's leading conservation groups. We work with communities in Northern Virginia, DC and the Maryland suburbs and we have 4400 subscribers in Fairfax and 21,000 across the region. Our research and work with our partners, communities and local governments demonstrates that the best way to address traffic, manage growth, protect our environment and enhance community value is through walkable, mixed-use, mixed-income transit-accessible communities.

Back when I was still in the Navy and working in the Pentagon in 1988, and when I had never heard of smart growth, I moved to a condo at Braddock Metro. It was in a four-story building mixed with three story townhouses and transitioned to 7-8 story condo's as you got closer to the Metro. I saw the benefits of a walkable neighborhood, good transit, and a wide mix of incomes, and a neighborhood that grew safer with every year that more people were out walking to parks, Metro, stores and restaurants. Metro and good planning were key to that transition. In recent years, five high-rise residential buildings and six city blocks worth of mid-rise residential buildings have been added to the Braddock Metro community, adding vibrancy to the neighborhood without impacting traffic.

In contrast, the outward expansion of our metropolitan area, and others like it, can shift jobs and investment in such a way that older areas frequently see declines in median incomes and investment. Fairfax has older commercial areas like Seven Corners and Bailey's Crossroads that reflect the impact of those shifts.

That's why the county is focusing on combining new transit investments with planning for walkable, mixed-use, mixed-income and transit accessible communities. Without good plans, public investment and incentives for private landowners to redevelop (including taller buildings), Fairfax's older commercial corridors and even its older single-family home neighborhoods can face gradual decline.

With good plans, Fairfax can provide great communities to handle expected population growth, creating places that are attractive to both the millennial generation and down-sizing empty nesters. Each person who lives within a walkable, transit accessible community will be more likely to walk, bike, use transit and to drive less, and they may not even own a car. In spread-out communities, 100% of trips are by car and their commuters crowd roads through communities closer-in. That's why a network of transit-oriented communities offer the best traffic management approach for our region.

Probably only about 10 percent of Fairfax' land is in its commercial corridors, but development within these areas is the best way handle the growth that is coming and to protect single-family home neighborhoods, parks, streams and remaining natural areas. Redevelopment of parking lots and areas that

often lack any stormwater management will also allow for the private sector to help retrofit modern stormwater management, helping to restore our streams.

Private investment can also be tapped to help fund the new school capacity that may be needed, while the net new school need might be less than one thinks -- given the increase in families without children. Given the huge downward trend in office demand due to government downsizing, more efficient use of space and telecommuting, it could very well be that there are other opportunities for efficient office to school conversions on the horizon as well.

The development proposals for Seven Corners and the Sears site, when combined with improved transit connections and an improved street network, will attract professionals and a diversity of incomes, while improving the look and feel of Route 7, enhancing property values throughout the area. The scale of the ideas for the Sears site and the adjoining parcels is appropriate -- with five stories stepping down to three and providing a playing field and community park amenity next to the innovative new school is a great idea.

We'll keep reviewing the draft proposals and make recommendations, but for now, I've come to support a new vision for the area. I am a conservationist and I have been involved with land use and transportation planning for two decades. I want to assure you that well-design, mixed-use redevelopment will be a net positive, helping to address traffic and stormwater, attract a diversity of incomes, and enhance property values. Thank you.

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