



July 28, 2015

Testimony re Seven Corners Plan

Chairman Bulova and members of the Board, the Coalition for Smarter Growth strongly supports the Seven Corners Plan but we also have equally strong recommendations. Our reasons for support are as follows:

First, if not here then where? Fairfax will continue to grow and the best way to grow without impacting single family home neighborhoods is in the county's commercial corridors.

Contrary to concerns expressed about density, it is the compact, mixed-use, walkable, bikeable and transit-accessible development proposed for the revitalization of Seven Corners and other commercial centers that offers the best way to reduce driving and traffic congestion, to attract companies, investment, and the next generation of employees.

The strongest aspect of this plan is transportation including the street network, complete streets for all users including pedestrians, bicyclists and those with disabilities, the solution for the Seven Corners interchange, and the new transit. Noteworthy are the protected bicycle lane on Route 7, the spine road and Route 50. Critical will be the dedicated transit lane on Route 7, frequent connections to the East Falls Church Metro Station and an additional connection not in the plan -- a dedicated transit lane on Route 50. At a time when too much money is being siphoned into highways from our new regional and state funds, we also steadfastly insist that funding the transit and local street networks for the Seven Corners Plan is a regional traffic solution that should be a priority.

The mix of uses, street network, loop road and connections over Route 50, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and transit -- combined with transportation demand management measures -- will dramatically reduce auto trips and congestion -- similar to what has been achieved in Arlington and to the 15% reduction just reported for Tysons.

Without the incentive of increased density and the coherent vision and plan represented here, the prospects for revitalization will be much more limited. Without revitalization of older commercial centers like this, property values in surrounding single family home neighborhoods can be impacted as jobs, investment, and wealthier residents go to more walkable and transit-friendly locations.

We also have important recommendations:

First, we are deeply perplexed by the opposition to a pedestrian connection from Shadeland Lane to the new elementary school and commercial areas. At a time when we are trying to encourage children to walk and bicycle to school for health and readiness to learn, we should not be discouraging this connection. For adults too, this would be a convenient, non-polluting connection. If the concern is with

parking by people from outside the neighborhood, then a parking permit program can be used.

Second, the stormwater provisions should be strengthened. The maximum reduction required is only 25% from existing conditions in some areas, and no reduction in others. Redevelopment offers one of the best opportunities to reduce stormwater and we believe the requirements can be strengthened without unduly increasing the costs to the private landowners, but we also believe they must be helped by the county doing its part to also use public spaces to also reduce stormwater runoff and the requirements should not be as stringent as required for greenfield development, but could be set at a 50% reduction over existing conditions.

Third, and most important, the affordable housing provisions are very inadequate and fail to provide for those at 60% of area median income and below. That the Planning Commission recommends relocation assistance and study of the issue is a start, but given that the county knows that most market rate affordable housing is within or adjacent to its commercial centers, the plans for these centers should always include strong policies, tools and funding provisions to preserve and add affordable housing. The 1 for 1 replacement, and 15% standards are good, but reaching 60% AMI means the private sector needs the county as a partner with funding and other incentives and tools. If this means countywide policy fixes and full restoration of the 1 penny fund, let's make it happen. NVAHA has a report recommending a range of policies and Arlington has developed innovative approaches for Columbia Pike.

To those who don't see this as a public function, we argue it's every bit a public role as transportation infrastructure or schools -- having a roof over your head is a basic need. Ensuring housing for all levels of the workforce helps employers fill lower level jobs, reduces traffic generated by longer commutes when people are pushed farther away, and providing stable housing is critical to the success of our children in school. A reasonable amount of county funding can leverage private and federal capital and tax credits, making deals and the production of more units for lower incomes possible.

So, we strongly endorse the plan and support the original density levels proposed, but also urge priority funding for the transportation plan, the Shadeland pedestrian connection, stronger stormwater provisions, and above all, much stronger affordable housing provisions and restoration of county funding.

Thank you.