

Minutes of the Seven Corners Transportation and Land Use Task Force Meeting October 8, 2013

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

Attendance:

Task Force: John Thillmann, Mary Ellen Ward, Evelyn Haught, Jim Edmondson, Iqbal Khaiy, Mark Silverwood, Jim McIlvaine, Martin Faga, Nathan Bath, Devin Corini, Blake Smith, Pat Hoar and Vince Burke.

Staff: Elizabeth Hagg (OCR), JoAnne Fiebe (OCR), Kimberly Rybold (DPZ), Kris Morley-Nikfar (FCDOT), Luis Pitarque (DPWES) and Aaron Frank from Supervisor Gross's Office.

Minutes and Administrative Items

The Task Force reviewed the Minutes of the September 10, 2013 meeting, and approved them unanimously.

Aaron Frank announced the Baileys Business Breakfast coming up on October 24th at 7:30 am at the Public House #7 restaurant on Leesburg Pike. He will send out an email reminder to Task Force members. Aaron also reported that Supervisor Gross will authorize the Comprehensive Plan amendment for the Seven Corners Study Area at the Board's October 29, 2013 meeting.

Updated Task Force Work Plan

John Thillmann distributed the revised Task Force Work Plan, which provides meeting topics through September 9, 2014 – the anticipated last Task Force meeting.

November Meeting – Discuss Transportation Charrette

Kris Morley-Nikfar gave an overview of what will be discussed at next month's transportation charrette. There will be two main topics: expanding connectivity to the area, with a special emphasis on bicycle and pedestrian connectivity along Route 50; and developing new concepts for the Seven Corners Interchange. The Task Force will be broken into two groups to discuss and brainstorm ideas. Staff and the transportation consultant will be on-hand as a resource and to facilitate and record the discussions.

John Thillmann asked if the BRT and LRT alternatives, as well as the East Falls Church Metro station loop alignment, recommended by the Task Force would be factored into the analysis. Kris replied that they are hoping to see additional connectivity from Route 7 to Roosevelt Avenue, and that they can assume certain levels and modes of transit in the transportation study modeling.

Presentation of Draft Land Use and Building Heights

JoAnne Fiebe presented two revised land use concepts – A and B, that incorporate the changes discussed from the previous meeting’s discussion of the draft land use concepts. In addition to the two concepts, JoAnne also presented the quantification of the development potential of each concept. She stated that the Task Force needed to review and refine the concepts so that the final quantification of the development potential could be given to the transportation consultants for testing in the transportation model. She emphasized that this does NOT mean that this is the final plan, but rather the intensity of land uses that they are interested in having tested in the transportation model.

JoAnne reviewed the main changes made to the concepts as a result of the input from the Task Force at the previous meeting. For Opportunity Site #4 she has relocated the future government center use farther away from Route 50 and is showing a small ground floor activity space or plaza along a main commercial street. JoAnne also identified locations where there were opportunities to trade-off ground-floor retail for residential development and vice versa with Opportunity Site #4. Another major change from the previous concepts was to increase the planned intensity of the Seven Corners Shopping Center site (Opportunity Site #3). B.F. Saul, the property owner, has hired an architect and has been exploring different redevelopment scenarios. They wanted to see an alternative with a bit more intensity.

JoAnne presented a map showing proposed Maximum Building Heights for the study area. Such an approach would not be proscribing the number of stories – just the maximum building height in any given location. This type of approach was in keeping with the Task Force’s desire for a form-based Plan. The proposed Maximum Building Heights map reflected changes from the previous meeting, principally adding additional building height for development along Wilson Boulevard. JoAnne also presented a figure ground drawing, which showed the silhouetted form of building footprints. She stated that this drawing revealed how the area would be transformed into more of an urban grid street network.

Iqbal Khaiy asked why the group had left out the condominium development to the west of the Willston Center site. Mark Silverwood replied that they left the condominiums out because 290 people would have to agree to be bought out – people who bought at different price points - and they just don’t see this property redeveloping.

Pat Hoar asked about whether the group had abandoned the idea to integrate with the redevelopment of the Eden Center. Kris replied that they could look at that issue during the transportation charrette. John Thillmann added that they would like to get buy-in from the City of Falls Church for whatever plan they come up with. He reminded the group of the Virginia Tech. student plan for that section of Falls Church City that had previously been presented to the Task Force.

Pat also commented that having taller buildings along Wilson Boulevard struck him as odd. Mark responded that the Cavalier Apartments located on Wilson Boulevard in Arlington are 14 stories, and that the quickest access out of the area is to take Wilson Boulevard to Roosevelt Avenue. Evelyn Haught said she was okay with taller buildings along Wilson Boulevard and did not see it as a problem. Pat thought that they should at least taper building heights adjacent to

the condominiums. There was a general discussion about needing to retain flexibility to respond to changing market conditions and the feasibility of financing different building construction types. Kim Rybold noted that the Plan language can have a maximum building height but also talk about tapering of building heights so that new development is compatible with existing development.

Vince Burke raised a concern about the vehicular bridge over Route 50 shown in both concepts. He said that it will create a major challenge because of the grades, and will require a great deal of study. Kris replied that they will need to evaluate the feasibility of such a crossing and where it would need to land in order to work. Vince asked how it would work if one side of Route 50 was ready to redevelop, but the other side was not ready. Kris responded that he has seen this type of project work in Atlanta, called Atlantic Station, where a bridge that straddles an interstate has development on either side. The development is built on three levels of parking so that the bridge level becomes the retail and pedestrian level. Kris said he would put a link to this development on the website so people could look at it. Vince appreciated the example and supports the overall objective, but remained concerned about the engineering challenges involved. Evelyn said that despite the challenges involved it was essential to have integration between the two sides of Route 50.

Jim McIlvaine stated that he would like to see less office and retail development proposed for his site (Opportunity Site #2) and more residential. He did not see a strong demand for office in the future here. Vince added that the demand for office space, in general, is changing and a current trend is to ascribe less square feet per employee.

There was a discussion about using FAR instead of DUs per acre to calculate the intensity of a site. John noted that dwelling unit sizes change over time due to market conditions and it should be the choice of the developer in how many units of what size get built. Mark concurred and noted that there is currently a tendency to build smaller and smaller residential units. He would like the flexibility to build whatever size unit the market dictates at the time he goes to redevelop.

John stated that he needed a general consensus from members about the concepts and their accompanying quantifications. First he focused on maximum building heights. He asked members whether the maximum building height in the study area should be 8 or 10 or 6 stories. Blake Smith liked the higher buildings near Metro. Iqbal asked if property owners who got greater height shouldn't also be expected to provide something more to make the area better. Pat did not support increasing heights in some places and would prefer a maximum of 6 stories; however, he would not stand in the way of the Task Force. Mark was fine with the idea of greater heights conceptually. He said he was not sure if he would build to a maximum of 10 stories on his own property, but that he would like the option. Others concurred with allowing a maximum of 10 stories. Devin Corini suggested saying 6 to 10 stories for areas planned for residential development, and that if the developer chose to go up to 10 stories he would have to have a narrower building footprint, activate the street front and provide other benefits. Vince liked the idea of having the flexibility to respond both to the market and to a site's topography. There was some additional discussion of having a minimum FAR, but the idea was withdrawn.

John said that a topic of the January Task force meeting will be to look at how they can activate the streets. He said it is important to make sure the buildings come to the street. He said they do not want to create the effect of towers in a park. Martin Faga expressed some concern about the cumulative number of residential units being proposed. He stated that he wants the transportation study to demonstrate ways to solve any resulting transportation impacts.

Finally, John moved that the Task Force recommend Option B be selected for testing in the transportation modeling, and further that for Opportunity Site #4, that the highest impact scenario (be it residential or retail) be chosen for the modeling. The Task Force approved the motion unanimously.

The next Task Force meeting will be a special **Transportation Charrette and is scheduled for Tuesday, November 12, 2013 at 5:00 PM** at the Mason District Government Center. Food will be provided for Task Force members and staff.

The Task Force adjourned at 9:00 pm.

By Evelyn Haught
Secretary

Date