

Fwd Leesburg Pike Opportunity Area vote in August return note from John Thillmann  
From: Jhtcav@aol.com  
Sent: Wednesday, August 20, 2014 10:20 AM  
To: Gardner, Marianne; Hagg, Elizabeth A.; Fiebe, Joanne K; Morley-Nikfar, Kris M.; Garcia, Michael W.; Suchicital, Bernard S.  
Subject: Fwd: Leesburg Pike Opportunity Area vote in August return note from John Thillmann

Hello All:  
FYI,  
John

-----Original Message-----

From: Catriona Macdonald <CMacdonald@LinchpinStrategies.com>  
To: Jhtcav@aol.com <jhtcav@aol.com>  
Cc: Martin C. Faga <mfaga@mitre.org>; aaron.frank <aaron.frank@fairfaxcounty.gov>; Dixie Rapuano <dixiemyrealtor@cox.net>; Kathleen Brown <kathleenabrown@verizon.net>; Michael Degitz <mdegitz50@gmail.com>; macdonald <macdonald@linchpinstrategies.com>; Smith Blake <bsmith@nahb.org>; Mason BOS Email <mason@fairfaxcounty.gov>  
Sent: Wed, Aug 20, 2014 10:12 am  
Subject: Re: Leesburg Pike Opportunity Area vote in August return note from John Thillmann  
Chairman Thillman,

I'm so sorry to hear about your family emergency. I hope everything is all right now. I know you are juggling a huge amount of work with the Task Force - not to mention other responsibilities! - and I appreciate the time you took to write and send this thoughtful reply to my message.

I also sympathize with how frustrating it is to be trying to wrap up a process like this as more and more people are getting involved at the end with questions and concerns. I spent almost ten years working on Capitol Hill, where we would have a similar challenge: you spend a year or more writing a bill; you beg people to get engaged, convey their priorities and needs, without response; you put together a carefully negotiated package; and then, at the end, just as you are ready to take the legislation to the floor, a flood of questions and requests comes in from people who didn't engage earlier. It's perhaps my least favorite thing about a democratic process, and it usually -but doesn't always - lead to a better result in the end. It's only too natural, I suppose, that people don't focus until the recommendations appear to be going somewhere. Hopefully, the wide and deep engagement of the neighborhoods on this side of Leesburg Pike which is now in full swing will help generate recommendations that have equally broad and deep community support.

Thank you also for delaying the vote on the staff options for the Leesburg Pike Opportunity Area to allow more time for Task Force and community consideration and comment, and for participation by community representatives who may have been away over the summer. I know you are anxious to wrap up this process, but we appreciate your responsiveness to our concerns on this. Many people - including me! -

Fwd Leesburg Pike Opportunity Area vote in August return note from John Thillmann are out of town for much of August. I'm trying hard to balance family time on my vacation with keeping up with all that is going on at home. My young daughter would tell you I am doing a miserable job with that balance!

I would like to offer the following thoughts for your consideration in response to the specific points you made in your reply to my email.

We are grateful for your support for limiting access to the Sears site to only Route 7, a very high priority for the Ravenwood neighborhood.

We understand that office and retail square footage means more trips. The neighborhood has very serious, and I think valid, concerns about density and traffic. We do not understand why it is necessary or advisable to approve higher density on this property than the County has approved virtually anywhere else, including immediately on top of or adjacent to Metro stations. We think that it is very possible that lower levels of density than were suggested in the charrette numbers can still be economically viable. Having said that, since we will get higher density and more traffic than we now have, we want to make sure that there is some benefit to the adjacent neighborhoods on the other side of the ledger. What can the plan offer us?

1) Traffic improvements, that come before - not significantly after - serious increases in traffic delays, added cars for more densely redeveloped properties, etc. The Task Force is telling us that is impossible, since developer financial contributions and construction of new roads is needed to improve traffic. I would still like to see commitments by the County and the State in advance of new, more dense redevelopment, and I wish that the Comprehensive Plan amendments would specify that improvements need to be made (or at least funded and permitted) before redevelopment can proceed. The best way to have the developers and the community on the same side is if everyone sees it in their enlightened self interest to push for the budgets needed to move transportation improvements forward. If the communities and the developers are pushing together for rapid dedication of transportation funds, it is much more likely to happen.

2) Neighborhood-serving retail. I have only lived in Ravenwood for fifteen years, but I have heard stories from neighbors about the property on Rte. 7 near Patrick Henry (now a funeral parlor) that used to be a neighborhood-oriented but high quality restaurant. Many neighbors recall fondly walking from their homes to the restaurant, especially during power outages in the neighborhood, when it became a gathering place. The addition of Dogfish Head is an improvement, but our neighbors want real, true, community-serving mixed development. We understand that doctors' offices, dental offices, stores and restaurants add cars and trips. But we are going to get cars and trips anyway. If

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we want to promote  
walkable, bike able communities, there has to be something to walk to. A massive  
residential  
development on our doorstep with a coffee shop and a dry cleaners doesn't put much  
in the "plus" column  
for us. As I have been dining in Shirlington over the summer, and now walking  
around Santa Barbara, I  
have been paying attention to what it is that makes those areas so attractive and  
successful, and what  
makes people come there and walk around. As you know better than I do, it is the  
shops and  
restaurants. We understand we have to have higher density in order to get them.  
Our fear is that we will  
get higher density, without the amenities.

3) Green space, parks, fountains, and trees. These amenities are a very attractive  
part of the overall  
Task Force vision for redevelopment, but seem pretty scarce in the various proposals  
for the Sears  
site. A thirty foot wide, grass "buffer" between single family homes and  
three-story townhouses is the  
length of the kitchen I am sitting in now as I write. These parklike,  
community-access spaces have  
received less attention in the dustup over density and traffic, but are also  
important and shouldn't be lost  
in the shuffle.

Because I am not limited by the same restrictions that you are, I am copying both  
Marty Faga and Blake  
Smith on this email. As you know, the other elected members of the Ravenwood  
homeowners  
association board are also copied.

Thank you again for all the time you have put in - as a volunteer - to lead and  
manage this unwieldy  
process. I remain hopeful that the Task Force's vision (and the details needed to  
make it a reality for all  
of us) prevails through all the steps of the process.

Catriona McCormack  
Ravenwood

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On Aug 18, 2014, at 5:03 AM, Jhtcav@aol.com <jhtcav@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Ms Macdonald:

Fwd Leesburg Pike Opportunity Area vote in August return note from John Thillmann  
I have been out of town on family emergency since late last Wednesday and returned only yesterday so have finally gotten to my emails. That said, I am somewhat surprised and dismayed that you think that the discussion on Tuesday evening was an abrogation of the Task Force's position on the Sears Site--it was quite the contrary. We are taking a position to our always expressed opinion that the Charrette numbers (of FAR) should govern on the Sears site (Land Unit C) and not the numbers as proposed in the Staff draft plan! The plan is only a draft at this point and we have not taken a formal position on the draft plan as that is slated for the September meeting.

The discussion at our next meeting relative to the Sears site is to clarify that position so that we are all on the same page and each TF member will advise the rest of us of their opinion or position and I also expect that we will discuss possibly proposing less office and retail on the site. The office and retail FAR significantly increases traffic trips from that site especially if we have only Rt 7

Access as I believe most of us support. The conversation at the TF meeting on July 8th (I believe you were there) is when we discussed bringing the Sears Site FAR as proposed in the Draft Plan down to the TF Charrette numbers and to ask that staff provide us with options for this--and those options were discussed at Tuesdays meeting. So what we discussed the other evening (Tuesday 12th) was the Charrette numbers---do you now understand?

I am somewhat taken aback at your implication that the TF is railroading anything. The only control I have is to convene the meeting and thereafter anyone on the TF can bring us any issue, ask for any information and make suggestions, and or call for a vote on any issue. We conduct all of our business in the open (there are no closed meetings) and we have listened to the community issues which I believe most of the TF members agree with.

You might want to remember that the membership of the TF includes someone from each of the communities that have spoken at the public comment meetings. Since all of the communities have a member on the TF, we have to assume that they have been informing their community leaders on TF actions. Indeed, they have participated in all of our meetings in the past two years and all have been active participants. I might add that the rest of the TF membership have deferred Sears Site development issues to the members who represent the communities around the Sears Site! Don't make the mistake of assuming that one TF member even if that member owns the land can decide what the plan will be for that land--we all on the TF have to agree, the Staff has to agree, and then the County Planning Commission has to agree and finally the County Board of Supervisors also have to agree. So when one member at the last meeting discussed the option that he liked the best that doesn't mean much other than it is one persons opinion. Many others also have to agree as well!

I was not able to cc the other members of the TF that were in your email to me as we operate under the open meeting rule where one of us can only communicate with one other member so only Martin Faga was cc'd

John Thillmann  
Co-Chairman

-----Original Message-----

From: Catriona Macdonald <cmacdonald@linchpinstrategies.com>  
To: JHTcav <JHTcav@aol.com>; Smith Blake <bsmith@nahb.org>; Faga, Martin C. <mfaga@mitre.org>  
Cc: Mason BOS Email <mason@fairfaxcounty.gov>; aaron.frank <aaron.frank@fairfaxcounty.gov>; Dixie Rapuano <dixiemyrealtor@cox.net>; Kathleen Brown <kathleenabrown@verizon.net>;

Fwd Leesburg Pike Opportunity Area vote in August return note from John Thillmann  
Michael Degitz  
<mdegitz50@gmail.com>; Catriona Macdonald <cmacdonald@linchpinstrategies.com>  
Sent: Thu, Aug 14, 2014 1:35 pm  
Subject: Leesburg Pike Opportunity Area vote in August  
Mr. Chairman,

At the Task Force meeting on Tuesday night, you presented three options for development of the Sears property, including one that would have 100% residential development, with no community-serving retail at all. A straw poll of Task Force members was conducted and the option with no retail was approved.

We are deeply concerned that, apparently, a binding vote will be taken at the next Task Force meeting, in August. I think it is fair to say that our neighborhood, which was well represented at the meeting on Tuesday, is up in arms.

We would like to note that:

- 1) This appears to directly contradict the vision's emphasis on walkable, community-serving, mixed development.
- 2) The proposal was not made public prior to the meeting, and was introduced after the public comment period portion of the meeting had been completed.
- 3) Several representatives of our community on the Task Force were not available to attend the meeting and represent the obvious, and predictable, concerns of our neighborhoods.
- 4) The vote is planned for the next August meeting, with no opportunity for community members to address the Task Force before the vote.

Whatever the intentions may be, it appears to our neighborhood that this change to the Task Force's recommendations is being railroaded through, during the month of August when many residents are on vacation, at the request of the developer.

In order to preserve the integrity of the Task Force process, its commitment to public input and to respond to neighborhood concerns, and the positive working relationship between the Task Force and the residents of the neighborhoods for which it is making recommendations, I urge you to reconsider this ill-advised proposal. At a minimum, I urge you to:

- 1) schedule a public comment opportunity on this significant revision to the Task Force's recommendations at a Task Force meeting, when all or virtually all Task Force members can be in attendance, to be held after Labor Day.
- 2) Delay the vote on this proposal until after public comment can be heard by Task Force members and residents can return from vacation to learn more about the proposal.
- 3) Share this request with all Task Force members.

Thank you,

Catriona McCormack  
President, Ravenwood Neighborhood Association

Catriona Macdonald

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