

We Have Been Selected to Be an Urban Community – Say NO.

Both Seven Corners and Bailey's Crossroads have been selected by the Board of Supervisors for urbanization as two of eight commercial revitalization areas in the county. The objective of the revitalization/redevelopment of the areas is to provide "activity centers" where future growth can be concentrated. With this unsolicited urbanization have come "urban vertical schools," first at Seven Corners (Bailey's Upper Elementary), now a second one at Bailey's Crossroads in the SE Quadrant plan amendment proposal. The community has a choice; we can accept the Board's urbanization with its urban vertical schools, or we can say NO and change the development scenario to one more in keeping with the community's character

On 8 October, Barbara Byron briefed a breakfast meeting of the Bailey's Crossroads Revitalization Corporation on the roles and responsibilities of the county Office of Community Revitalization. Ms. Byron is the director of the office. She explained that the Board of Supervisors has determined that future growth should be concentrated in mixed-use "activity centers" in lieu of trying to accommodate growth throughout the county. Two foreseen advantages of the policy are reduced growth pressures on existing residential areas and easing the task of providing the infrastructure and services necessary to accommodate growth. The Board policy is described in several areas of the Policy Plan section of the Comprehensive Plan, for example, Objective 6 and the associated implementation Policy b on page 5 of the Land Use section. (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/comprehensiveplan>)

Objective 6: Fairfax County should have a land use pattern which increases transportation efficiency, encourages transit use and decreases automobile dependency.

Policy b: Concentrate most future development in mixed-use Centers and Transit Station Areas to a degree which enhances opportunities for employees to live close to their workplace.

On 12 Oct 1998, the Board created five Commercial Revitalization Districts and two Commercial Revitalization Areas with the purpose of encouraging economic development in these older commercial areas that were seen to be threatened by under-utilized and dilapidated properties. (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/revitalization>) The areas nominated are:

- Commercial Revitalization Districts:
 - Annandale
 - Bailey's Crossroads
 - McLean
 - Richmond Highway
 - Seven Corners
 - Springfield

- Commercial Revitalization Areas:
 - Lake Anne
 - Merrifield

Mixed use development is described in the Revitalization section of the Policy Plan as a principal means for revitalizing these areas. For example, Objective 1 and the associated implementation Policy f state:

Objective 1: Fairfax County should establish or expand community reinvestment programs in its older commercial areas (and their adjacent neighborhoods) which have experienced or are on the verge of experiencing economic or infrastructure decline.

Policy f: Encourage mixed use development concepts which seek to create “activity centers” through the integration of retail, office and residential uses.

At Seven Corners today, every parcel of land is zoned either for residential use or commercial use. Residential units may not be constructed on parcels zoned commercial and visa versa. The transition to mixed use requires that the Comprehensive Plan’s “vision” for land must be changed from residential or commercial to mixed use. This modification of the Plan does not change the zoning, but it allows the zoning to be changed later when a developer files an application.

The Comprehensive Plan for Bailey’s Crossroads was changed to mixed use in 2010, allowing up to 8900 residential units to be developed. The Seven Corners Visioning Task Force convened by Supervisor Gross in 2012 completed its proposed Comprehensive Plan amendment for a transition to mixed use with up to 6000 residential units on 23 September. It was said at the outset of the task force activity that the group was to produce a “community vision” of the future of Seven Corners, whatever future the community preferred. But it’s clear from Board policy, the selection of Seven Corners as one of the commercial revitalization districts, and the 2010 Bailey’s plan amendment that the intention has been to make the transition to high-rise mixed use in order to allow Seven Corners to be developed as one of the eight urbanized, commercial revitalization centers of the county where future growth will be concentrated.

One consequence of the unsolicited urbanization of our community is the “urban vertical school.” The Bailey’s Upper Elementary School that opened on Leesburg Pike at Seven Corners in September is the county’s first such school. It features a five-story building on a small blacktop lot; a location on a noisy, busy highway; no gym; no outdoor recreation space; and no green space whatsoever. During the ribbon cutting ceremony on 15 October, county officials lauded the school as a gold standard for the future, the best that can be done. Residents were promised a second such school, the one now proposed for Bailey’s by the SE Quadrant plan amendment. And all the while, the green, five-acre Willston School property has stood by conspicuously idle.

One test of the urban vertical school model is to ask ourselves whether parents would select such a school for their children where a traditional county public school with green space on a neighborhood site was available. To the extent that most of us would select the traditional

school, communities assigned to urban vertical schools can expect both a second-rate school experience for their children and depressed property values.

County officials have said that the urban school is the best that can be done. But that's not true. There is no requirement for us to accept urbanization, and no requirement to accept the urban vertical school. There are alternatives for the further development of our community and alternatives available for our schools. But changing the conversation from the county's intent upon urbanization to a scenario more in keeping with our character will require a concerted community effort.