

**Testimony before Fairfax County Planning Commission**  
**Public Hearing on Fairfax Forward Process Evaluation Report**  
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Processes in government must be transparent and provide checks and balances to guard against abuses by public officials, their assignees, and their staffs. It is not indelicate to make this statement here, and it implies no criticism. Our federal and state governments were founded and are organized in support of this principle. But county government is different. We have no separation of powers. The Board of Supervisors sets the policy, executes the policy, and alone decides whether policy has been applied fairly. We are an oligarchy, rule by 10 individuals elected every four years.

How then are we the people served by such a government? Realistically, there are few internal checks and balances. Naturally, the supervisors' assignees and staffs lean forward in the directions prescribed by the Board. They may provide advice and council, but ultimately the Board decides. We citizens are left to stand outside looking in and asking, "What's the county doing now?"

Enter Fairfax Forward. Here, land use planning relies upon out-of-turn plan amendment proposals submitted by property owners, developers, and perhaps others. Supervisors decide for their districts the proposals that will be accepted into the work program, and Supervisors are left to produce the plan amendments with task forces, or the like, and staff support.

There is only one requirement for engaging citizens in the process, state-mandated hearings on two-weeks notice. Otherwise, there is no requirement for citizen participation, nothing that takes note of whether the opportunity for participation in a planning project is adequate or not, and nothing that would stop a project where the opportunity is lacking or flawed. Supervisors are free to pack task forces with allies, appoint developers as task force chairmen, and bring plans and amendments to hearings without first vetting them with citizens.

Fairfax Forward opens wide the door for abuse. Surely it has occurred to others that the process is an opportunity for serious money to change hands between developers and supervisors. Again, no accusation, but it does point out a fatal flaw in the closed process. Another concern is the opportunity for a supervisor to pursue personal agendas, for example, a campaign to construct an expensive county office building in her district, or a conviction that new elementary schools should be urban schools like Bailey's Upper Elementary School – on blacktop with no auditorium, no gymnasium, and no green space. At the dedication ceremony for the school, a supervisor praised it as the gold standard for future elementary schools in Fairfax County. Residents of my acquaintance were appalled.

Please thank about it. How are citizens able to break into the closed, supervisor-centric Fairfax Forward process under these conditions?

And the conditions are not hypothetical. In a separate paper submitted for this hearing, a paper of my own, I recount some recent Mason District experiences that demonstrate the need for transparency and checks and balances that can be provided only by adequate opportunity for citizen engagement in the land use planning process. The experiences are based on the Seven Corners task force and recent planning activities for the SE Quadrant at Bailey's Crossroads. The paper is short. I hope some of you will have the interest to read it. I have asked commission staff to send it to you electronically.

**Fairfax Forward requires a mandatory process for citizen participation. Please add that requirement to the evaluation report.**

Finally, on page 6 of the report, under the heading "Analysis," the 3<sup>rd</sup> sentence states that the Seven Corners planning study concluded with consensus among stakeholders. Nothing could be further from the truth. **The county should be aware that no resident of the community, save one developer, supported the Seven Corners plan amendment. NO ONE.** Characterizing the amendment as achieving consensus among stakeholders is simply dishonest. Please take "Seven Corners" out of the sentence.

Thank you.