

Testimony Opposing Proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendment for PDC/PRM Districts

Fairfax County Planning Commission Public Hearing
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Clyde A. Miller, President
Holmes Run Valley Citizens Association

This testimony opposes the proposed zoning ordinance amendment and recommends that the county consider an alternative approach based on a high-density overlay zoning district.

Opposition is based on concerns about negative consequences for surrounding communities, including loss of community services and retail outlets, congested roads, cut-thru traffic, parking overflowing into neighborhoods, incompatible landscaping and screening, tall buildings looming over homes, and overcrowded schools and parks.

1. Concerns

A principal objection to the amendment is that it nominates every selective area for unlimited high-density development with floor area ratios (FARs) as high as five. The consequence would be intense pressure on communities from property owners, developers, and the county to accept high-density developments that ultimately could damage surrounding communities.

The staff report argues that the Comprehensive Plan would protect communities from high-density developments. However, the Comprehensive Plan would not provide reliable protection for any selective area:

- **Form-Based Plans:** The plans for Annandale, Seven Corners, and much of Bailey's Crossroads are form-based plans. They recommend maximum floor areas, not floor area ratios. The amendment immediately would allow the Board to approve 5.0 FAR developments in these areas.
- **CRDs:** Secondly, in all revitalization districts, Board policy encourages concurrent plan amendments with rezoning applications. The process would allow the Board to approve 5.0 FAR developments overruling plan FAR recommendations.
- **Fairfax Forward:** Finally, the new Fairfax Forward process that the Board has adopted for managing changes to the Comprehensive Plan intends to expedite processing of plan changes recommended by supervisors, property owners, and developers. The process readily can change the FAR recommendation in any plan.

There is no confidence in Mason District that the county's hearing process will protect our community from high-density developments. Thorough vetting of plans at the district level is essential to the effectiveness of the formal hearing process. However, in Mason District, the supervisor commonly submits plans and plan amendments to the hearing process without first vetting them with the community. In 2012 thru 2015, representatives of neighborhood associations were not allowed to participate on the Seven Corners task force for which the supervisor selected a developer to direct both the public meetings and the county staff supporting the task force. The county's plan developed by the task force universally was opposed by citizens. Just last evening, 150 citizens attended a meeting of the Mason District Land Use

Committee to oppose the supervisor's project to move the Bailey's Community Shelter. The move is one element of her new plan for the SE Quadrant, a plan that was **not vetted** with the community, a plan that was **strongly opposed** by the community in the hearing process, and a plan that was adopted nonetheless by a majority of the Board on 16 Feb.

The proposed amendment immediately would allow the Board to approve 5.0 FAR developments in three revitalization districts nearby Holmes Run Valley, an unacceptable risk to the wellbeing of the community.

Three additional objections are:

- First, the amendment fails to adequately protect adjacent communities from consequences of high-density development - in fact it relaxes current ordinance requirements in this area;
- Secondly, the need for the amendment has not been demonstrated - high-density development within ¼ mi of Metrorail stations is insufficient justification for the broad scope and potential community consequences of the proposal; and
- Finally, the proposed regulation language regarding floor area ratio is ambiguous to the point of misleading.

2. Recommended Alternative

It is recommended that the county consider developing a high-density overlay district in lieu of the proposed amendment. The high-density regulations should be applicable to any parcel appropriate for high-density development; should not single out selective areas; and should include provisions that adequately protect surrounding communities. The PDC and PRM regulations would not be changed. PDC/PRM regulations overlaid with the high-density district regulations would provide regulations for high-density PDC/PRM districts. The ability of the Board to approve high-density developments in the Richmond Highway Corridor and elsewhere would be no less than under the terms of the amendment. The amendment's nomination of all selective areas for unlimited high-density development is unnecessary and threatens communities; it would be avoided.

3. Conclusion

The need for the amendment has not been substantiated, its broad scope threatens to damage communities, and it is opposed by the large majority of citizens responding to the proposal. The zoning ordinance amendment should not be adopted. Please consider the alternative.