



Alliance of Reston Clusters and Homeowners
Supporting Homeowner Groups in All of Reston's Neighborhoods

ISSUES BULLETIN 2008-1

August 27, 2008

ARCH Member Meeting With County Staff

When: September 10, 2008, 7:00 p.m.
Where: Conference Room, Supervisor Hudgins's Office, North County Gov't Center, 12000 Bowman Towne Drive
Subject: Soliciting Community Input for the Proposed Reexamination of Reston's Planning Documents and Processes

In preparation for the above meeting, the ARCH Issues Committee has already met with, or solicited input from, several Reston individuals and/or representatives of Reston organizations who have planning expertise. The aim was to identify and discuss key questions and/or areas of concern that might be relevant to the proposed reexamination of Reston's planning documents and processes. The ARCH Board felt that a summary of these matters – ranging from improved traffic solutions, arrival of Metro, targeting future residential and commercial growth, neighborhood master planning, zoning improvements, and increased public facilities and open space -- might prove helpful to our members as you individually assess what you believe might be worth sharing with County Staff during the upcoming September 10 meeting.

SCOPE OF THE PROPOSED REEXAMINATION

At the meeting kicking off this process, County Staff said it intends to examine only the Reston Master Plan ("RMP"). The blue print for this process that Supervisor Hudgins issued states that this exercise should allow for consideration of:

“ . . . anything [Reston “stakeholders”] believe would be relevant to a planning exercise for Reston's future development. Broadly speaking, that may include anything that concerns the adequacy/sufficiency of Reston's existing planning documents (to include land use and infrastructure issues), adequacy/sufficiency of the existing planning/zoning processes, and thinking about a future community vision (maybe more broadly put, what do we hope or believe Reston will look like in 2030 and what, if anything, in addition to what already exists in terms of planning documents and processes do we need to do to get there).”

The ARCH Board lauds that broad objective. To accomplish that, however, we think this exercise should include a reexamination of the County Comprehensive Plan and Planned Residential Community (PRC) Ordinance, as they apply to Reston, in addition to the RMP. These are the three foundational planning documents for Reston and they can and should be assessed in a holistic way, with the focus on defining Reston's long-term vision and how we get there.



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TRAFFIC AND RELATED IMPROVEMENTS

The number of vehicles per housing unit, and the number of miles driven per person, have increased substantially since the RMP was adopted forty years ago. Supervisor Hudgins has also said the Dulles Corridor is “projected to have 337,000 jobs in 2025” (up from 205,000 in 2000), which will add to the traffic strain (even if Metro arrives). This leads to several questions:

1. How are we going to minimize traffic congestion and maximize traffic flows in Reston? Put differently, in what ways, if any, should the Transportation Map of the RMP be updated? Widening and other improvements (including elevated intersections) for Reston Parkway and Route 7 are perhaps examples that deserve special attention.
2. Should the recommendations of the Reston Metrorail Access Group, or RMAG, be made part of the RMP?
3. Should new development or redevelopment not be allowed to proceed unless and until related traffic improvements identified and made part of the RMP are first made?

METRO

In considering what “we hope or believe Reston will look like in 2030,” as suggested in Supervisor Hudgins’s blue print for this process, Metro is highly relevant. Whether there should be a Silver Line extension of Metro is beyond the scope of this Issues Bulletin, but what is in scope is this: the ARCH Board has the clear sense that the decided majority of our members feel that if there is going to be a Silver Line extension it must go all the way to Dulles Airport (and/or beyond) and not end at Wiehle Avenue. All planning done to date, including and importantly the RMAG recommendations, have assumed that the proposed Wiehle station will be only a temporary end terminus. Anything beyond that, we feel, could significantly change the character of the community and present serious environmental impacts. If there is to be rail, it must be rail to Dulles (and/or beyond), not rail to Wiehle.

LOCATING FUTURE RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL GROWTH

Should additional increases in the Reston population and redevelopment in Reston be focused on the key population centers – Town Center, the four village centers, and the Reston Center for Industry and Government (the “RCIG,” a 760-acre strip along the toll road that is currently limited to commercial development only)? To the extent that, under the existing planning documents, future development would be permitted outside these key population centers, should that possibility be reexamined to determine if that is something consistent with our community’s vision for its future?

Relatedly, we understand it is possible (theoretically) to redevelop and build out existing clusters to allocated densities. This raises with some concerns about the stability of these established residential neighborhoods. Should there be limitations placed on that kind of redevelopment?



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If changes to the density cap(s) or the way they are calculated are proposed, should an assessment of the impact to the environment and Reston's quality of life be required before those changes could be adopted?

MASTER PLANNING FOR INDIVIDUAL NEIGHBORHOODS TARGETED FOR GROWTH

In addition to the kind of planning exercise now underway at Lake Anne, should there be master planning exercises for other village centers in Reston? In addition to Hunters Woods, South Lakes, and North Point, we think master planning exercises for Town Center and the RCIG as part of this planning reexamination deserve special consideration:

1. **North Town Center:** The proposal for redevelopment of Spectrum Center illustrates this need. We understand that the Spectrum plans were changed several times at the request of different decision makers at different points along the decision-making process, in part because there is no master plan to which the Spectrum redevelopment can be oriented (by way of example, whether retail in the Spectrum redevelopment should be inwardly or outwardly focused). Should there be a north-south connector for Town Center much as Market Street operates as the east-west connector, and should the two be connected? If so, can and/or should Fountain Drive feasibly be that connector, or should it be some new or other boulevard? Does New Dominion Parkway create challenges to linking North Town Center with the rest of Town Center in an integrated way that will promote easy pedestrian movement throughout the entirety of Town Center? How is open space to be preserved and made accessible for all in Reston to enjoy? And in what ways can the County lot in North Town Center, so critical to Town Center's future development, be utilized in ways that maximize that lot's potential for the community? We want to be clear that no one is suggesting that Lerner Enterprises (owner of Spectrum), the County, or any other lot owner is not entitled to seek maximum return on investment (or, in the County's case, appropriate utilization for County purposes). The issue, rather, is this: Should there be a master plan in place to which future development within Town Center should be oriented?

2. **Reston Center for Industry and Government:** We think this is important to undertake whether or not the Metro Silver Line extension becomes a reality. The ARCH Board believes the community should be, and is, open to the idea of vacating or modifying the RCIG covenants to allow for residential growth, but that there ought to be a coherent, rationalized master plan for that change that, among other actions, identifies the appropriate residential density for this critical acreage in the heart of Reston. That in turn raises an important issue: Should RCIG be subject to the PRC Ordinance or its own separate zoning requirements? The point is that we think this planning reexamination should be used as an opportunity to rethink the RCIG (and that should include an assessment of the fairness and economics of any RCIG residents accessing and using Reston common areas).



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ZONING

The Reston Planning and Zoning Committee serves only in an advisory capacity. The Fairfax County Planning Commission has legal authority over all development in Reston. Should additional ways of promoting local (Reston) control over Reston zoning decisions be explored?

Should there be height and lot limitations, if not setback guidelines, in the PRC Ordinance as it applies to Reston?

OPEN SPACE AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

The ARCH Board does not view growth, by itself, as either a positive or negative. What we view as essential is that growth, if it is to be, must contribute to the betterment of Reston, which will occur only if it is properly planned. With the kind of growth that is projected for our region in the near future comes important public facility questions:

1. Are additional community/public facilities needed to support this increased development (to include fire, police, libraries, public works, etc.)? Improved pedestrian access should be part of any such improvements, to include, for example, better pedestrian crossways across main thoroughfares like Sunset Hills Road and Sunrise Valley Drive.
2. Should additional development be made contingent on funding first being in place to support any expansion of public facilities that are identified as necessary to support such growth?
3. Do there need to be additional requirements and/or protections built into the planning documents to protect and promote open space?

THE NEXT PHASE OF THIS PROCESS – IDENTIFYING PLANNING IMPROVEMENTS

Once County Staff has completed its interviews with Restonians to obtain ideas/input on the planning exercise (the current "Intake Phase," of which the September 10 meeting with ARCH members is a part), Staff will then "identify and make recommendations to Supervisor Hudgins as to a process to address the ideas/issues/concerns that are raised." (Quoting Supervisor Hudgins's blue print.) The ARCH Board believes this would best be approached by appointing a community-driven entity (presumably a task force) composed of local citizens and representatives of local community groups. This would help ensure that the ultimate recommendations have community support and buy-in. Although planning expertise probably should not be a prerequisite to appointment in all cases, whatever group is appointed must have individuals on it who do have planning expertise, and in all events appointees must have a keen interest and commitment to working on what are certain to be a series of challenging and complex issues. This group also needs to be linked with and supported by County Staff. Consideration should also be given to retaining an independent consultant with urban/suburban planning expertise.