

INTERSECT

NEWSLETTER

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WASHINGTON REGIONAL NETWORK FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

VOLUNTEER SPEAKERS SOUGHT

Interested in sharing your enthusiasm for smarter growth with a wider audience? WRN is putting the finishing touches on its Solutions To Sprawl slide show and is seeking volunteers to help spread the word. A speaker training is being organized for January. If you're interested, please contact Deborah Katz at (202) 667-5445 or debkatz@megsinet.net.

WRN PROPOSES INNOVATIVE STRATEGY TO FUND NEW YORK AVENUE METRO

BY CHERYL CORT, WRN PRESIDENT

With the groundbreaking for the New York Avenue Metro this past Saturday, the District has an excellent opportunity to adopt an innovative strategy to help fund the station's \$84 million design and construction. Some of the nearby property owners have offered to contribute \$25 million toward this effort, but what form this will take is undecided. WRN's strategy would base the private sector contribution on land value rather than total property value (land plus buildings), square footage, distance, or some other measure.

It makes sense that those who benefit the most from this investment should pay the most. Indeed, owners of land closest to a station entrance will be able to charge much higher rents and prices for their property than will owners further away. Because the benefit to each owner is best reflected in the value of his or her land, an equitable way to collect the property owner contribution is through a user fee based on land value.

On the other hand, if fees are based on total property value (land plus buildings), those who construct and maintain buildings (thereby providing housing and jobs near Metro) will shoulder more of the burden, because their property values are significantly higher than that of owners of vacant lots. A fee based on land value alone

makes sure that owners of vacant lots pay their fair share. It also ensures that those who benefit the most, namely property owners in close proximity to the station, pay in proportion to the benefit they receive.

In addition to the equity issue, basing the private sector contribution on land value alone is also more efficient at achieving the goals of building the Metro station in the first place. These goals include revitalizing an existing neighborhood (rather than continued low-density sprawl across the countryside), and providing better pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access in an area that already suffers from traffic congestion. Because a land value approach does not impose any fee on building value, it is less expensive to renovate, construct, and maintain buildings. This facilitates development near the Metro.

Legislation is currently being drafted to determine the size of the special business district and the basis on which fees will be charged to each landowner. Some landowners suggested that their Metro contribution could be deducted from future taxes. This would transfer the cost of their contribution back on the taxpayers citywide. WRN hopes the Mayor and Council resist this because this is unfair. The landowner's contributions are investments in their properties which will be repaid many times over in the marketplace. We also hope city leaders support the land value approach as a fair and efficient technique that promotes development where it belongs: in walkable neighborhoods near transit.

FAIRFAX CONSIDERS URBAN CENTERS

BY DEBORAH KATZ, WRN COORDINATOR

Known more for its low-density sprawl and auto-dependent lifestyle, Fairfax County is considering a special zoning category to direct growth into more walkable neighborhoods around Metro stations and current and future town centers. Planners are also examining ways to

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FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

WRN advocates transportation investments, land use policies, and community designs that enhance existing communities and the environment of the National Capital Region.

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Comments and articles welcome.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of WRN.

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improve the design of these areas to make them more attractive and pedestrian-friendly. The new zoning category would encourage builders to provide compact mixed-use development.

“This policy is an important step towards making more efficient use of our transit system and the land adjacent to it instead of continuing to lose open space, create worse traffic, and build places that aren’t safe for our kids to walk,” said Laura Olsen of the Coalition For Smarter Growth at a November 2nd hearing. “With 300,000 people projected to be moving to Fairfax County in the next 20 years, the county cannot afford to continue current patterns of sprawling development.”

Specifically, the proposal calls for an increase in housing, a greater mix of uses (to include office, retail, and services such as daycare), and an improved pedestrian environment around Metro stations and in town centers. Drive-thrus, one of the staples of suburbia, would be banned in the new, pedestrian-oriented zones. Fairfax is already moving forward with a higher-density, mixed-use development around the Huntington Metro station and has begun working on improving the pedestrian environment in Tyson’s Corner.

WRN concurs with the Coalition For Smarter Growth and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation that the zoning category is a welcome idea but that it needs to be improved. First, to maximize Metro as a transportation alternative, WRN recommends that the zoning focus higher density mixed-use development and pedestrian environment improvements around a half-mile radius of transit station platforms, allocating the greatest density at or immediately adjacent to the transit station. Permitting well-designed higher density residential and mixed uses is an important step in making these centers better places to focus the County’s growth. These centers should not be wasted on surface parking lots and low density uses. Maximum densities should be designed in a way that creates incentives for providing more amenities such as public plazas, ground floor retail, and more affordable housing.

Second, WRN recommends the development of more detailed urban design guidelines as an update to current Comprehensive Plan. In particular, the design of the pedestrian environment and the provision of urban parks and public plazas need to be fully addressed. Poorly designed pedestrian environments that create unattractive automobile-dependent areas and that have no open space will likely fail to sustain citizen support. Citizen support is also more likely if Fairfax becomes more proactive in preserving rural resource lands and creating regional

parks, the flip side to focusing growth in town centers.

Third, WRN recommends that the new zoning districts be created only where high capacity transit services to and from urban/suburban centers are planned or currently provided. Urban centers should establish aggressive travel demand management (TDM) strategies to reduce parking demand and automobile traffic, and extensive pedestrian and bicycle facilities should be incorporated into the design.

In considering the new zoning category, Fairfax joins a number of jurisdictions across the country looking for alternatives to single-use, sprawl-inducing zoning. For example, Kendall, Florida, a suburb of Miami with regional activity center status due to its two transit stops and access to nearby expressways, has adopted an overlay zoning ordinance that moves buildings up to the street (helping to create pedestrian-friendly boulevards), gets rid of surface parking lots, and aggregates open space into meaningful squares and parks. Projects that meet the plan’s guidelines are put on a fast-track review.

The Fairfax Planning Commission has approved the new zoning category but chose a lower density option among four presented by planning staff. It is important going forward that Fairfax County reserve the right to increase density in selected buildings in return for securing important amenities. These actions will create the kind of urban village transit centers that will enable Fairfax and the region to accommodate growth gracefully: maximizing the region’s investment in transit and commuter rail, building walkable neighborhoods, reducing traffic congestion, and preserving open space.

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors will hold a hearing on the Planning Commission’s recommendation on Monday, Jan. 8th at 3 pm. WRN encourages Fairfax residents to participate in the discussion and to support the new zoning category and the ability to increase density at certain locations. For more information, contact Maggie Stehman, Fairfax Zoning Administration Branch, (703) 324-1314. To sign up to speak at the hearing, call the Clerk of the Board’s office at (703) 324-3151, or send a letter c/o Clerk, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 533, Fairfax, VA 22035. The hearing will be held at the Government Center Building at 12000 Government Center Parkway. For more on the Kendall, Florida plan, visit <http://www.doverkohl.com/kendall.htm>.

WHO’S RIDING METRO? HOW DO WE KEEP THEM ON BOARD?

BY BEN ROSS, ACTION COMMITTEE FOR TRANSIT

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Metrorail is gaining new riders. While suburb-to-downtown commuting represents the largest segment of riders and is growing, our independent analysis, using numbers collected by Metro's farecard machines, shows that there has been an explosion in rail travel to suburban jobs.

Over the past five years, morning rush-hour trips into downtown (including the Crystal City-Rosslyn corridor) increased by 13 percent. In the same period, commuting to destinations outside the urban core (defined as D.C. and part of Alexandria) rose by a spectacular 34 percent. A look at where commuters get on Metro shows that reverse commuting, especially from less affluent neighborhoods, is the biggest growth area. AM Metro boardings are up by a third since 1995 at Anacostia, Addison Road, Minnesota Avenue and Navy Yard.

Our elected representatives deserve much of the credit for this increase. Bus service has improved; in 1998 Metrobus began to grow after years of shrinkage. And policies that lavishly subsidize the automobile have become a little more even-handed. Maryland now offers a tax credit to employers who help pay transit fares.

To keep Metro on this upward curve, we need to locate jobs and housing close to Metro. Ridership has shot upward where zoning rules have allowed smart growth -- lively, walkable mixed-use neighborhoods around transit stations. Downtown Bethesda demonstrates the popularity of this concept, and commuting by Metro to jobs there has climbed 38 percent.

But smart growth alone can't do the job, because Metro wasn't designed for suburb-to-suburb commutes. New rail lines are needed in three key corridors: from Bethesda through Silver Spring and College Park to New Carrollton, from West Falls Church to Tysons Corner and Dulles Airport, and across the new Wilson Bridge. The explosion in rail travel to suburban jobs shows that commuters seek an alternative to sprawl and traffic jams. We must give that opportunity to more of them.

Action Committee for Transit is a Montgomery County organization of transit riders and can be reached at easi@worldnet.att.net. Ben Ross is author of the article entitled, "Suburbs, Status & Sprawl," appearing in the winter, 2001 issue of Dissent on newsstands.

USING THE MARKET TO CURB SPRAWL

To help policymakers respond to the growing public mandate to curb sprawl, Redefining Progress's brochure,

"Policy Options for Reducing Sprawl: A Critical Overview," presents three recent market-based policy innovations. These policies - location-efficient mortgages (LEMs), space-based impact fees, and split-rate property taxes - harness the market's power to encourage development close to existing infrastructure. Call Ansje (pronounced Ancha) Miller at (510) 444-3041 for more information. The brochure will be posted shortly at <http://www.rprogress.org>.

BETTER MODELS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN VIRGINIA

The Conservation Fund has published "Better Models For Development In Virginia," proposing six principles and 25 key ideas for balancing conservation and economic development in the Commonwealth. Each principle and idea is supported with practical advice, real life examples, extensive photos and illustrations, and sources of additional information. The report shows how new development can be made more attractive, more efficient, more profitable, and more environmentally sensitive. The report focuses more on greenfield development than WRN would like; the key is to put development where it belongs: in walkable neighborhoods near transit. \$15 + \$3 S&H. Contact: (703) 525-6300.

THANK YOU

WRN would like to extend its sincere thanks to Virginia State Senator Mary Margaret Whipple and staffer Janie Burton for their assistance in helping WRN obtain exemption from Virginia sales tax. As with all such exemptions in Virginia, it took an act of the legislature. WRN would also like to thank the following for their financial contributions to WRN: Janet Welsh Brown, John Campanile, John Chase Maxwell, Skip Gain, William Janssen, Kristin Pauly, Niels Pemberton, Gayle Pinderhughes, Richard Reis, Doug Willinger, and organizational contributor P.N. Hoffman, Inc.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mon, Jan. 8, 8:30 - 3:30 pm - "Federal Planning, Urban Revitalization, and Smart Growth in the National Capital Region." Issues include the location of future federal offices and other facilities; partnerships to promote and develop waterfronts in the District and the region; the effect of federal development on transportation investments; and the enhancement of connected open space and preservation of natural and historic resources. Sponsored by the Council of Governments and the National Capital Planning Commission. Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, 14th Street NW between Constitution and Pennsylvania Avenues. For info/registration (free): (202) 962-3220 or visit http://www.mwcog.org.

** Sat, Jan 13, 9 am - 4 pm - Walkable Communities Workshop. Dan Burden is nationally known for his success in using interactive workshops to bring together elected officials, planners, designers, and community interests to come up with road improvement solutions that meet everyone's needs. This workshop will use the U.S. Route 1 corridor in College Park, MD as a test case. Mr. Burden served for 16 years as Florida DOT's State Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator before forming Walkable Communities, Inc. Registration fee of \$15 includes lunch and refreshments. School of Architecture Auditorium, University of Maryland/College Park. Register: Ellen Jones, (202) 628-2500, waba@waba.org. For more info, visit http://www.walkable.org.

Mon, Jan 15, 2 - 5 pm - Maryland Environmental Legislative Summit. Legislative Services Building, Joint Hearing Room, 90 State Circle, Annapolis. RSVP by Jan. 8 to Maryland League of Conservation Voters at (410) 280-9855 or dburger@mdlcv.org.

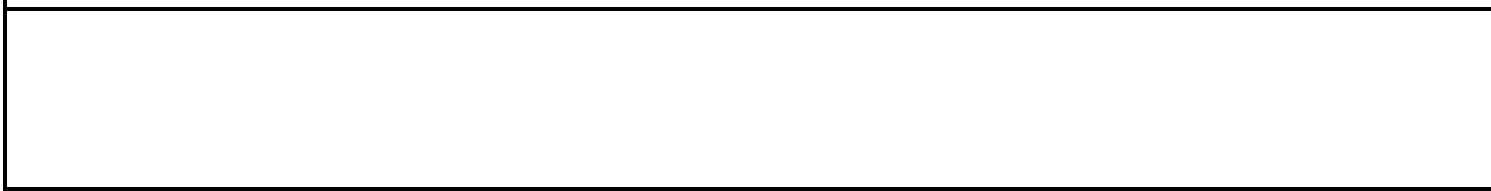
Mon, Jan. 15, 11 am - 7 pm - Virginia Conservation Network's Legislative Day, Richmond. Give a day for balanced transportation, wetlands and farm preservation, open space funding, and other issues! Briefings and meetings with legislators, reception at 5 pm. \$10 (includes lunch) or \$25 (lunch and reception). For registration and carpool information contact Ellen Shepard at (540) 362-3538 or ellenshepard@yahoo.com.

Meetings of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB), 777 N. Capitol St, NE (Union Station metro). Contact: Donna Duncan (202) 962-3311.

Jan. 5, TPB Tech Cmte (9 am)

Jan. 17, TPB (10 am)

Jan. 11, TPB Citizens Advisory Cmte (6 pm)



WRN Contribution Form

___ *** Add \$20/person for Intersect to be faxed long-distance or mailed (to cover costs).

Individual Contribution Categories:

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___ Sustainer \$120 (includes WRN mug & a copy of WRN's vision. *A New Approach*)

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___ Sustaining \$500

___ Intersect sent to up to 15 individuals by email or local fax*

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___ Constant recognition on WRN's website with link (email 200 word description & your web address to debkatz@meginet.net)

Please attach separate sheet for additional persons:

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___ Interested in volunteering. Please contact me.

___ Please keep my name/information confidential.