

INTERSECT

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D.C. Office of Planning to Create Urban Villages

“It’s not just about creating a project – it’s about creating places,” D.C. Office of Planning Director (DCOP) Andrew Altman, stressed when presenting the findings of the Mayor’s transit-oriented development task force at WRN’s March Forum.

As defined by the Mayor’s task force, *Transit-oriented development* or TOD is a “land use strategy to accommodate new growth, strengthen neighborhoods, and expand choices and opportunities by capitalizing on bus and rail assets to stimulate and support vibrant, compact, diverse and accessible neighborhood centers within an easy walk of transit.”

Dr. Alice Rivlin introduced the D.C. Office of Planning’s recent work on TOD as an implementation of the goals set forth in the 2001 Brookings Report she co-authored, *Envisioning a Future of Washington*. The report sets a goal to increase the District’s population by 100,000 residents, especially families, over the next ten years. Rivlin applauded TOD as a District strategy to reduce vacant and abandoned properties, revitalize communities, accommodate new residents, especially families, and take advantage of livable communities while decreasing regional traffic.

To establish a context for how connecting land use and transportation could benefit the District, Altman explained that D.C. lost 25 percent of its population since 1970 while at that same time the region grew by 35.5 percent. The Office of Planning hopes to exceed predictions for the District’s share of projected regional growth in the next 10 years. Altman presented several overlay maps developed by the Office of Planning to indicate the areas with the greatest opportunities for TOD. There are 400,000 residents and 1,150 acres of vacant, abandoned, and underutilized land within a 10 minute walk from the 39 metro stations in the District. Major bus corridors also offer a tremendous opportunity, he said, with 2,000 acres of

vacant, abandoned, or underutilized lands nearby. Already, over 55 percent of District residents bike, walk, use transit, or take a taxi to work. By concentrating development in urban ‘villages,’ the Office of Planning hopes to decrease local infrastructure costs by 25 percent. Support for TOD exists, according to the results of the Mayor’s Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan, ten out of 39 clusters prioritized TOD.

Altman highlighted several keys to achieving successful TOD, including good planning, an effective transportation system, employer participation, regional partnerships, and community education about the design principles and benefits of TOD. To make TOD a reality in D.C., Altman identified the following strategies: prioritizing areas for public investment, hiring a TOD Coordinator for the District, conducting 3-5 station area plans a year, establishing appropriate design guidelines and zoning, promoting regional approaches to TOD, defining ‘transit-opportunity areas’ in the city’s comprehensive plan, utilizing strategies such as location efficient mortgages and targeting federal employees and neighborhood anchor institutions to increase the fiscal productivity of the city.

Altman spoke to the Office of Planning’s partnership with the D.C. Department of Transportation as they work to increase transit ridership, provide innovative service, and improve safety and access for pedestrians and bicyclists to help make Metro stations inviting and welcoming places, not parking lots. Altman strongly suggested that the District take a stronger role especially working with the Washington Metro Area Transit Authority (Metro) – “D.C., and inner jurisdictions of MD and VA share common concerns so we need to put together an urban caucus and ask ‘What would a future be like centered around transit?’”

In a complement to Altman’s presentation, WRN’s Redevelopment Organizer, Heather Deutsch, presented the new PowerPoint slide show, *Metro In Your Neighborhood*, which uses local images to illustrate good urban design concepts and provides a set of principles and check list for

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WASHINGTON REGIONAL NETWORK

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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evaluating how development and transportation facilities can enhance a community.

Audience members raised concerns about affordable housing, incorporating schools, and emphasizing good design as critical to TOD. Altman responded saying that investing in older and distressed community schools is central to a successful neighborhood strategy. He reiterated the importance of good design and finding a balance between open space needs, safety, and the efficient use of space. One audience member speculated that the D.C. Office of Planning merely rubber stamps projects pre-selected by the Mayor. Altman disagreed, although he said the process could be improved by creating a planning commission or other formal process for public reviews of plans as other jurisdictions have done successfully.

The D.C. Office of Planning is working to kick off the TOD initiative with a design workshop on June 8. This fall there will be another opportunity to learn more about TOD when D.C. hosts the national Rail~volution Conference October 3-6 which will be directly followed by a D.C. Transit & Livable Communities mini-conference.

Fairfax City Splits Tax, Promotes Revitalization by Benjamin Wiles, WRN Intern

A new law signed by Governor Mark Warner (VA-D) gives the City of Fairfax the ability to use a split-rate tax system as a tool to spur redevelopment in blighted areas. Under the split-rate system, buildings and their improvements are taxed at lower rates than the land they are situated on, encouraging land owners to build and improve on neglected properties without fear of much higher taxes.

Proponents of the split-rate believe that the old system of taxing improvements and property maintenance leads to speculation and neglect. Under the two-tiered system, the city believes that property owners will have an incentive to build on and restore underutilized lots if the structures are taxed at a lower rate than land. "By allowing for a split rate tax, the city can target areas for revitalization, particularly large parking lots, to create pedestrian friendly neighborhoods," said Stewart Schwartz, Director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth.

Some members of the business community are skeptical about the system and believe that it gives the jurisdiction too much control over which communities will be targeted for redevelopment. The Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce, concerned it could raise taxes for businesses located in low density areas or on large parcels of land, has

formally opposed the split-tax system. Some members fear that the system will overburden their businesses and cause them to move to other areas.

In Pennsylvania, the renewal of urban centers has been attributed to the adoption of a split rate tax system. The City of Harrisburg, once considered one of the countries most distressed cities, has reduced its 4,200 vacant buildings to under 400. "Pennsylvania cities [who incorporate split-rate systems] have seen greater investments in new construction since adoption, far exceeding the record of nearby similar cities lacking this reform," the Center for the Study of Economics concluded in a study of 17 cities.

Fairfax City Council will hold public hearings and conduct community outreach before deciding whether to adopt the new tax structure.

Community Creates Vision for D.C. General Site

In early March, the D.C. Office of Planning held a community-planning meeting to discuss the future of the 67 acres of the former D.C. General public hospital site, known as Reservation 13.

The three-day effort focused on including residents in the creation of a Draft Master Plan, which will be used to design the future of development on that site. The site, which includes the D.C. General Hospital and the D.C. Jail, stretches along an expanse of the Anacostia River and is within a five minute walk of the Stadium Armory Metro station.

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Support *Intersect*, Join WRN

This newsletter is a free service. Please help WRN continue to report on these issues important to livable communities; join WRN and support *Intersect*. WRN welcomes all donations but a basic membership is \$35 for individuals and \$200 for organizations. Contribution forms are available on our website: <http://www.washingtonregion.net/html/contributionform.html>.

WRN thanks the following individual donors for their continued support of WRN's programs advocating for livable communities in the National Capital Region: Deborah Katz, Allan Borut, Stephanie Mickelson, Ellen Jones, Louis Lieb, Kristin Pauly, David Bruner, Steve Waters, James McGrath, and Chris Brown. Thank you!

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Over one hundred residents and activists gathered over three days to express their views and help create a plan for the site. After initial presentations and questions, residents discussed various aspects of the plan including transportation, health services, land-use and parks in small groups.

A majority of the attendees felt that the site should recreate the street and sidewalk grid of the city, extending Massachusetts Ave. to the river as a wide boulevard of shops and offices. Bay, Burke and C Streets would continue through the site, lined with housing, surrounding a small park and shops. Many citizens focused on the lack of a public health care facility and felt that a fully functioning public hospital should be included on a portion of the site, pointing out that the eastern half of the District is largely underserved by health care facilities. While some participants strongly voiced concern over the closing of D.C. general and are critical of the current planning process, most community members appeared to appreciate the opportunity to shape future uses for the site.

Planners and a consultant team used the themes presented by residents to create a guideline the city will follow in the development of the site. The 15-point list includes the creation of a mixed-use urban waterfront neighborhood utilizing environmentally sensitive design, enhanced bicycle and pedestrian access to the Metro station and access to needed services such as a town center and safe open spaces.

For more information see the D.C. Office of Planning website. <http://planning.dc.gov/project/reservation13/index.shtm>.

Region Moves Forward – Still a Long Way to Go for Clean Air

by Melanie Mayock, Sierra Club Organizer

After eight months of wrangling over how to clean up the region's air, the Metropolitan Washington Transportation Planning Board agreed at its February 20th meeting to proceed with adopting clean air measures. The programs include purchasing an additional 200 clean natural gas buses, installing bicycle racks on Metrobuses, and encouraging employers to offer transit benefits to employees.

The vote followed a surprise announcement that Maryland Governor Glendening committed to fund a portion of the measures, which have a total cost of \$38.5 million. Previously, representatives of the Maryland, Virginia, and D.C. Transportation Departments had all expressed

unwillingness to fund the programs.

Smog is a serious problem in the Metropolitan Washington region, causing 130,000 asthma attacks and sending over 1,100 people to the hospital every summer. Last year the region had 24 days in which air quality failed to meet federal health standards. Moreover, a new study from the University of Southern California shows that smog may cause childhood asthma, which afflicts 50,000 children in the D.C. region.

Last summer transportation planners discovered that emissions from cars and trucks in the D.C. region were higher than expected, and the region would fail to meet its 2005 clean air goals unless additional steps were taken to reduce pollution. Instead of enacting programs to reduce emissions from vehicles, regional leaders tried to solve the pollution problem on paper through modeling changes and lobbying for an increase on vehicle pollution limits.

The clean air measures adopted by the Transportation Policy Board are a first step in solving our dirty air problems. However smart growth and environmental advocates point out that the region still needs to: invest in maintaining and expanding regional transit systems; put more jobs, stores, and housing near Metro stops; and channel development to areas with existing infrastructure. These programs will enable people to drive less and will greatly improve the region's air quality and quality of life.

Successful New Bus Route Follows Inner Purple Line in Maryland

On Tuesday, April 23, Maryland Transportation Secretary John D. Porcari, local officials, community leaders, and riders joined together for a celebratory ride to kickoff the new International Express, or Metrobus route J-4. This new bus service runs between College Park and Bethesda following the route of the proposed inner Purple Line; it already has substantial ridership compared to new and existing buses. Supporters believe that the early success of the International Express proves that this is the right route for the Purple Line.

Latino community groups along the route celebrated the inaugural ride with dozens of cheering residents and purple balloons. "The J-4 is a long overdue recognition of the thousands of low wage workers who make up the daily trip to wealthy Montgomery county neighborhoods," said Gustavo Torres, the Executive Director of CASA of Maryland.

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The International Express provides direct east-west service between two of the region's largest employment centers, connects several established communities, and is intended to relieve overcrowding along Maryland's International Corridor. Bus stops include College Park, Langley Park, Takoma Park, Long Branch, Silver Spring, and Bethesda. Funding for the International Express was provided by Governor Glendening's Transit Initiative of 2001. Ben Ross, of the Action Committee for Transit, said that this new route already has more riders than buses that have been traveling from Bethesda to Tysons Corner for five years. He believes this "shows how important it is to serve existing walkable communities."

The state of Maryland is hosting an open house and public information meeting on the Bethesda Silver Spring Section of the Purple Line also known as the Georgetown Branch light rail line on May 23 from 4:30 – 8:30pm at the Silver Spring Holiday Inn, 8777 Georgia Avenue. For information call the Maryland Transit Administration at 301/565-9665.

Affordable Housing Loses in D.C. Budget Debate – Activists Call for Action

Opinion by Janet W. Brown, WRN Board member

The Housing Production Trust Fund took a major hit during the Council's budget actions on Tuesday May 7 – with a chance of losing half of its funding, permanently. This despite work by activists attempting to restore funds for housing and human services (which sustained more than half of the cuts proposed in the Mayor's budget) at budget hearings.

Although Councilmember Adrian Fenty (D-Ward 4) proposed to restore full funding to the Trust Fund by adding \$7.0 million for fiscal year 2003 (October 2002-September 2003), his proposal was defeated. Many councilmembers actually spoke against additional funding, largely based on their view that money in the Trust Fund would go unspent. This counter to the claim made the week before in a letter to the entire council endorsed by over 40 groups and individuals that stated, "Fully funding the Housing Production Trust Fund would take little more than one half of one percent of total local revenues. The investment of these funds could produce or preserve up to 2,000 units of housing each year...as well as draw significant additional resources, public and private, to the city."

Apparently at the Mayor's request, Linda Cropp (D-Chair) introduced an amendment to the Budget Support Act that will permanently limit the so-called dedicated funds, from 15 percent of recordation fees and property transfer tax, to

7.5 percent. Only Councilmembers Fenty and Jim Graham (D-Ward 1) argued and voted against this. If this is allowed to stand, the funding for the Trust Fund – the only DC money that can build or rehab low-income units and ADD to the housing supply – will rapidly disappear altogether. In addition, the Council took \$500,000 from the Trust fund to fund tax abatements to build luxury housing downtown.

Fixing the city's affordable housing crisis will not happen in just one year. Ongoing funding at the full level is needed to make a real dent in the problem. The Budget Support Act will go through another reading and be voted on again on June 4th (according to the Council's secretary). Affordable housing advocates urge citizens to call councilmembers and register their opinions regarding the Housing Production Trust Fund by June 4.

Virginia: Sales Tax Referendum to Fund Road Building

Both the Senate and the House passed SB668 with Governor Warner's amendment. The result is that there will be two referenda on transportation sales tax increases in November: one in Northern Virginia and one in Hampton Roads. If the Northern Virginia referendum passes, there will be an 11% increase in the sales tax. "This money will fund new highway bypasses and widenings that will cause more sprawl development instead of reducing traffic congestion. Meanwhile, throughout Virginia education and health care faced budget cuts this year" according to Stewart Schwartz, Director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth.

Maryland: Road Building Bill Defeated, Open Space Funded

The Public-Private Transportation Act of 2002 was defeated in the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee. It was opposed by: citizens groups, the environmental community, labor, MDOT, State Highway, the Maryland Transportation Authority, and the Montgomery County Council. These groups claimed it was an open door for private businesses to build roads and bridges throughout Montgomery County without full public input, environmental analysis, or a study of alternative strategies.

The Maryland General Assembly restored \$44 million for land preservation and other environmental programs. They are: Program open space, Rural Legacy, Agricultural Land Preservation, Greenprint, the Conservation Resource Enhancement Program (CREP), Maryland's smart growth

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initiatives, and the Chesapeake Bay resource conservation programs. "We cannot afford to backslide in our efforts to protect open space. As we well know in this fast growing region, once land is consumed by development, it's gone forever," said Theresa Pierno, Exec Director, CBF Maryland Office. These programs are tools used to protect open space from development, and protect air and water quality.

High D.C. Taxes an Urban Legend

A recent report by the D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute shows that when income and property taxes are taken into account, D.C. taxes are not really higher than Maryland or Virginia. According to this report, overall D.C. residents pay less than Montgomery County and Prince Georges County residents, and between \$340 and \$1,500 more per year than most northern Virginia residents. The study looks at a family of four at income levels of \$50, \$100 and \$150 thousand.

You can read the full report from the D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute. *D.C.'s Excessively High Taxes: Just Another Urban Legend* <http://www.dcfpi.org/4-11-02tax.htm>.

Resources: PLANetizen Newswire

The PLANetizen Newswire is a resource for planning and development news, and events via email every Monday and Thursday. The PLANetizen website also features job postings, book lists, editorials, announcements, and other useful resources. Subscribe to the Newswire through the PLANetizen website: <http://www.planetizen.com/>.

Farewell to Cassie Seiple, WRN Coordinator

I want thank Cassie, WRN's coordinator for over the past year, for the tremendous job she has done. The Board is grateful for Cassie's contributions to improving the organization in every way, both administratively and professionally. Her conscientiousness and commitment to WRN's mission is apparent in everything she does. Cassie is moving on to explore her long-held interest in working with youth and the arts. We will sorely miss her. We wish her well wherever she ends up, and expect to hear great things about her in the future.

– Cheryl Cort, President

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday, May 15, 7:30pm. **Alexandria Bicycle Committee meeting** The Alexandria Bicycle Committee works on bicycle facility and route planning and maintenance, education and other activities to make Alexandria a bicycle friendly community. Meetings are at 7:30 pm on the third Wednesday of the month at the Lee Center, 1108 Jefferson Street. <http://bicycle.alexandria.va.us>. To join the list serve, contact Bruce Dwyer 703-549-3263, ouibike@att.net.

Thursday, May 16, 7 – 9pm. **Sierra Club Clean Air Video Volunteer Training** Help the Sierra Club launch an educational campaign about air pollution and sprawl in the D.C. region, using a new video, "Red Alert! The Washington Region Fights Unhealthy Air." Location: Sierra Club D.C. Office, 401 C St NE (Capitol Hill, 10 min. walk from Union Station). To RSVP or for more information contact Melanie Mayock, 703-312-0533 x110; Melanie.Mayock@sierraclub.org.

Saturday, May 18, 10am – 2pm. **Oxon Hill Metro Festival** This event is designed to raise awareness of what a Metrorail station could do for the revitalization of downtown Oxon Hill and of the need for Metro on the Woodrow Wilson bridge. Location: Downtown Oxon Hill, contact: Bonnie Bick 301-839-7403.

Wednesday, May 22, 7:30 – 9pm. **"Living the Sustainable Life in European Cities"** Pamela Lindstrom, land use expert and member of the Montgomery County Transportation Policy Report Task Force, will present this slide show at the White Oak Library, 11701 New Hampshire Ave, Silver Spring (C8 bus route; ride provided to Red Line Metro afterwards).

Saturday, June 1 8:30am – 12noon. **Public Forum on the Design of Arlington Boulevard** to gain input into the development of a plan to improve the function, appearance and safety of Arlington Boulevard in Arlington County. Short, medium and long range projects will be discussed and four current VDOT projects on Arlington Boulevard will be reviewed. Location: Thomas Jefferson Community Center, Contact: Charles Denney, AICP, cdenney@co.arlington.va.us.

JOB LISTINGS

The Shaw EcoVillage Project seeks full-time **Program Director** for EcoDesign Corps, an urban environmental leadership program (www.shawecovillage.com). Must have: 3-5 years professional experience in related field, minimum bachelors degree (masters preferred), experience in curriculum development, and a minimum 2-year commitment. Position start date will be early July. Contact shawecovillage@shawdc.com or (202)265-8899. *(for additional events & job listings, see www.washingtonregion.net)*