

INTERSECT

NEWSLETTER

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WASHINGTON REGIONAL NETWORK FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Affordable Housing Funding Wins Big Across Northern Virginia

By Stephen Wade

A convergence of groups advocating for dedicated funding for affordable housing in Northern Virginia has won unprecedented commitments from the governments of Fairfax, Arlington, and Alexandria.

Affordable housing advocates, tenants' groups, faith communities, service providers, community activists, bankers, and for-and non-profit developers secured major increases in local support for housing trust funds in all three Northern Virginia jurisdictions during the recent budget cycle. In response to soaring home values and a diminishing supply of affordable housing, Fairfax County dedicated one penny of each dollar of the real estate tax rate, Arlington County continued its strong annual appropriation to the Affordable Housing Investment Fund which included new local recordation tax revenue, and Alexandria also dedicated one penny of each dollar of the real estate tax rate and its title recordation fee.

In Alexandria, the City Council dedicated \$3.6 million to affordable housing. This is a major increase over past annual commitments that have averaged \$400,000 per year for the Housing Trust Fund. The Tenants' and Workers' Support Committee, Housing Action, and WRN led the effort.

"This is a great first step. However people can't sleep on money. We need to turn trust funds into housing -- that is, housing for the people who are being displaced every day," said Jon Liss, Executive Director of the Tenants' and Workers' Support Committee.

Arlington County appropriated \$4.5 million in new funding for affordable housing in FY 2006. This new money supplements other county housing programs, including an average \$3 million per year allocation to the Affordable Housing Investment Fund. Arlington's Ad Hoc Affordable Housing Group continues to lead the way on these issues.

In Fairfax County, a diverse coalition of affordable housing activists pressured the Board of Supervisors and educated the public about the need for affordable housing and much

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WASHINGTON REGIONAL NETWORK

FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

WRN advocates transportation investments, land use policies, and neighborhood designs that enhance existing communities and the environment of the Washington D.C. region.

FORUM ANNOUNCEMENT

Arlington Responds to Affordable Housing Challenges:

with

Chris Zimmerman, Arlington County Board

Thursday, May 26, 2005

National Capital Planning Commission
401 9th Street NW, North Lobby, Suite 500*
6:00 pm, refreshments; 6:30 pm, program

Arlington recently announced its intention to strengthen its efforts to preserve and create affordable housing despite a court challenge and attacks from the Virginia General Assembly on its policies. Arlington County Board Vice Chairman Chris Zimmerman will discuss recent challenges and the county's efforts to incorporate affordable housing as part of new development.

RSVP (attendance only): WRN, 202-244-1105, or e-mail: staff@washingtonregion.net. This event is free of charge. For more about WRN, see: www.washingtonregion.net.

NCPC is located between E & D Streets, NW; Closest Metro: Gallery Place, Metro Center, Archives, Federal Triangle. Please arrive before 7 pm and bring photo ID.

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THE ENTERPRISE FOUNDATION

Planning for a Safe Walk to Wheaton Metro Shows Potential for Suburban Places

By Cheryl Cort

Planning a safe and pleasant pedestrian environment around transit stations is good for everyone—it's good for pedestrians, transit riders, businesses, and traffic engineers—according to Nat Bottigheimer with a special planning office within the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT). Speaking at WRN's April 21 forum on creating a pedestrian

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Cheryl Cort, editor; Stephen Wade, William Vincent, Pamela Lindstrom, Linda Bailey, Andrew Steeble contributing writers; Lyn Stoesen, editorial assistance and contributing writer.

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greater local funding. An affordable housing task force convened by Board Chairman Gerry Connolly also made local funding for the preservation of affordable housing its number one priority. Departing from years of annual contributions averaging just over \$1 million per year to the Housing Trust Fund, Fairfax County will now dedicate over \$18 million a year to support affordable housing.

“This funding comes at a critical time for our county. We are seeing an alarming increase in condo conversions occurring. These resources will quickly be put to use to stem this loss,” said Paula C. Sampson, director of the Fairfax County Department of Housing and Community Development.

Housing advocates are pushing Fairfax to establish a task force that will decide how to most effectively administer the new money, along with the parameters by which the money is allocated. Activists have urged the county to move quickly in closing real estate deals regardless of the administrative body that is in charge of the money.

Advocates are encouraging a similarly open process for Alexandria, so that the administration of the new funds, including aspects like income targets and affordability control periods, could be agreed upon.

Arlington County has a track record of effectively using its AHIF money in projects like the Gates of Arlington/Ballston and the First Baptist Church of Clarendon to both preserve and produce affordable housing.

Washington Area's Transit Service Saves Commuters 41 Percent in Delays

By Linda Bailey

The Washington area again ranked 3rd nationally in the annual traffic congestion rankings according to a new report by the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI). However, these rankings don't reflect the dramatic impact of transit and operational improvements. Without transit, the study finds that area commuters would face delays 41 percent longer.

For the third year in a row, the TTI quantified the benefits to commuters of public transit and operational improvements such as HOV lanes. TTI's report found that transit service is saving D.C. area commuters almost \$1 billion each year and saving each peak period traveler from sitting in traffic an additional 41 percent longer than they currently do, or 16 minutes on a 40-minute commute. The D.C. area is ranked 5th in the country in total congestion cost savings from transit, just ahead of Boston. HOV lanes and operational improvements such as signal timing, ramp metering and incident management were found to save area commuters \$114 million annually.

For tables highlighting important information for the D.C. region, see: mobility.tamu.edu/ums/congestion_data/tables/national/table_3.pdf

Shady Grove Sector Plan Progresses Toward Creating an Urban Village

Opinion by Pamela Lindstrom

Montgomery County is making the great transition from suburban to urban development. Progress has been fitful. Though the new urban policies have not been fully explained or adopted, they can be detected in the draft master plan for the Shady Grove Metro station area. This plan has been through community, Planning Board and County Council committee review. It still must be considered by the full council.

Good urban development comprises far more than large scale and high density. The council's planning committee discussed many of the big issues. Some were navigated successfully, some too tentatively, a few were evaded.

Jobs and housing: One of the chief hopes for the urban transition is that development (and peoples' lives) can be less dependent on highways and driving. To achieve that goal, there must be a balance between jobs and housing for workers in fairly close proximity, or along a transit axis. The I 270 Corridor has become a major job center with a huge shortage of housing.

The Shady Grove plan has the right goal - adding as much housing as possible. The implementation does not measure up to the goal. The plan adds zoning for over 6000 housing units, but it adds much job capacity also. The reduction of the housing deficit is negligible. Officials allowed the pattern of large office park zoning to continue along Shady Grove Road. But residential zoning was also limited by lack of school capacity. The problem is lack of the 10-30 acre school sites still considered necessary.

County planning officials recently adopted job/housing ratio targets for regions of the County. The forecast for the I 270 Corridor is 2.25; the target is 1.82. If the needed reduction was allocated among individual planning areas, Shady Grove would be far from meeting it.

Moving the County Service Park: Much of the land near the Shady Grove Metro station is owned by the county and used for facilities like bus storage and maintenance. When discussion of this plan began, moving these facilities and developing the property seemed a distant dream. No one had any idea where they would go or if developers would be willing to pay the cost. Currently, two developers have expressed interest in moving the facilities in exchange for developing the property. Instead of competing, they formed a partnership which is developing a plan with agency officials. When the planners needed to put a school on "their" property, the developers offered to buy a better site farther away. The officials have gone from extreme skepticism to

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eagerness. We all knew that the market for transit-oriented development is hot; this shows us just how hot it is.

Streets and traffic: Traditional suburban plans limit the density of development according to the traffic capacity of expanded roads. This plan requires a new philosophy: zone for the density of development that the site deserves. Then require strong traffic mitigation plans, and allow development to proceed only if trip reduction targets are met. Streets internal to the town center will be pedestrian-oriented with low design speed. Whether Frederick Road (Rt. 355) will be an urban boulevard or stay a major highway for through traffic, is unclear.

Montgomery County's parking requirements are nearly the same whether a building is near a Metro station or not. Thus parking requirements for transit-oriented development are considerably higher than Arlington's. The council finally asked the planners to study possible reductions.

Public perception: The Metro station area is bordered to the east by Frederick Road and the new King Farm development. To the west are older residential areas in Derwood. Little was heard from the King Farm residents, except their desire to walk across Frederick Road more easily. Initially, opinion was divided in Derwood. Some were eager for the urban amenities and increase in their property value. A second group came to dominate public input, by defining the Metro station area as part of Derwood, and thus demanding suburban scale development.

The smart growth arguments mean little to local residents, and were at times misused against urbanizing Shady Grove. What nearby residents do care about is getting public facilities that they perceive as most valuable to their community. That was done fairly well, though some issues remain.

D.C. Inclusionary Zoning Hearing Set for July

By Stephen Wade

Nearly six months after the D.C. Campaign for Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) submitted its text amendment to the Zoning Commission that proposed a mandatory inclusionary zoning policy for the District of Columbia, the Zoning Commission responded by setting public hearings on the topic for July. While the D.C. Office of Planning recommended examining a voluntary program and its "hybrid" mandatory program, the Zoning Commission chose only to set a hearing on the two mandatory proposals.

For more see: www.dciz.org and, for DCOP's report, see: <http://planning.dc.gov/planning>.

Rail to Wiehle Avenue Advances, Problems Cited

By William Vincent

In February 2005, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) included the 11.6-mile extension of Metrorail in Virginia to Wiehle Avenue as a "recommended" project in its Annual Report on New Starts for fiscal year 2006. The Metrorail extension from Wiehle Avenue to Loudoun County via Dulles Airport was not included.

The overall "recommended" rating does not guarantee federal support for the Wiehle extension, but helps keep it eligible for federal funding if the project meets the requirements set forth by statute and FTA guidelines.

In its report, the FTA indicated that meeting the final eligibility requirements is still an open question for the Wiehle extension. For example, the FTA assigned the Wiehle extension a "medium-low" rating for cost-effectiveness. In March 2005, the FTA stated that, as a general rule, in the future, it plans to offer future "recommended" ratings only to projects "able to achieve a 'medium' or higher rating for cost-effectiveness." Thus, it is unclear whether the Wiehle extension will receive a recommended rating next year.

The FTA's annual report also expressed concern about the total amount of federal money requested for the project. The federal share for rail to Loudoun currently is estimated at around \$1.75 billion, with \$760.5 million in federal funds requested for the Wiehle extension alone. The FTA stated that "[h]istorically, more than \$500 million in New Starts funding has rarely been provided to any single major capital investment project."

Finally, the FTA took note of Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's (WMATA)'s financial difficulties, which has been the reported cause of overcrowding, delays, and breakdowns throughout the Metrorail system. Specifically, the FTA stated that before the Wiehle extension can receive federal funding, "WMATA's ability to meet its capitalization, operations, and maintenance needs over the next 20 years" must be demonstrated. WMATA's chronic financial problems, coupled with the apparent unwillingness of local jurisdictions to create a new dedicated source of funding, casts significant doubt on whether this requirement can be met. To date, WMATA has struggled to develop a strategy to raise the billions of dollars it needs to address its 20 year financial needs. WMATA currently faces a \$1.88 billion shortfall over the next ten years alone, with major additional shortfalls projected over the 20 year horizon. Providing secure funding for the full 20 year period required by FTA has not been addressed.

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The FTA's annual report also touched upon other potential issues for the Wiehle Avenue extension. For example, the report noted that the Wiehle extension is expected to attract 15,100 "daily new riders" by 2025, at a cost of \$1.525 billion, or roughly \$101,000 per daily new rider. Five years ago, in its annual report to Congress for fiscal year 2001, the FTA predicted that a bus rapid transit (BRT) system would attract 13,600 daily new riders by 2020, at a total cost of \$279.8 million, or roughly \$20,600 per new rider.

The number of daily new riders is an important measure of transit effectiveness. Daily new riders are people who did not use transit before a new system was built. Often, these people previously used cars, making them a good proxy for both air quality and traffic congestion relief. Rail's much higher price tag, coupled with no major increase in daily new riders, likely will play a role in future considerations of cost-effectiveness.

FTA also provided a "medium-low" rating to existing transit-supportive land use, specifically noting the auto-oriented development pattern, limited pedestrian infrastructure, and low parking charges that currently define Tyson's Corner. By contrast, the FTA provided a "medium-high" rating for future transit-supportive land use plans and policies.

Maintaining the higher rating is dependent upon Fairfax County's ability to plan and implement transit-supportive development, better street connectivity and pedestrian environments, and other transit-friendly improvements in Tyson's Corner.

The Wiehle extension currently is in the "preliminary engineering" phase of the FTA's New Starts process. Preliminary engineering is expected to be completed by the end of the year. FTA then will conduct a review to determine whether the project should advance to the "final design" phase of the process. Once final design is complete, FTA will review again to determine whether the project is eligible for a "full funding grant agreement." Construction cannot begin until a full funding grant agreement is in place

For more information see: <http://www.dullestransit.com/>

Following Lawsuit, EPA Approves Air Cleanup Plan

By Lyn Stoesen

The Environmental Protection Agency has approved air cleanup plans proposed by the District of Columbia and Virginia, following an order issued by a federal judge that set a deadline for the agency to rule on the plans as required by law.

While parts of the Maryland plan were OK'd, it was disap-

proved overall due to a lack of pollution fees for large industries, a requirement of the Clean Air Act, the Sierra Club reported. Sanctions on the state may be imposed if the plan is not corrected within a set timeframe.

The rulings mean that anti-smog requirements will now be enforceable in federal court in the region. The decision followed an April order from U.S. District Judge James Robertson in a lawsuit filed against the EPA by Earthjustice on behalf of the Sierra Club.

Also recognizing the Washington area's poor air quality, the American Lung Association's *State of the Air: 2005* report ranked Washington, D.C., as among the worst cities in the nation for ozone and particle pollution. For more see: www.lungusa.org.

The High Cost of Free Parking Explained

By Cheryl Cort

"Few people recognize parking requirements as a disaster because the costs are hidden and the harm is diffused," author and UCLA professor Donald Shoup told New Urban News, referring to his new 734-page book "The High Cost of Free Parking."

At a March 21 press conference Shoup said, "parking requirements cause great harm: they subsidize cars, distort transportation choices, warp urban form, increase housing costs, burden low-income households, debase urban design, damage the economy, and degrade the environment."

Shoup recommends three key reforms. First, cities should remove off-street parking requirements for all land uses such as housing, restaurants and offices -- cities should not force anyone to provide more parking than people are willing to pay for. Second, cities should charge fair market prices for curb parking, which would be the lowest price that will achieve about a 15 percent vacancy rate for curb spaces so that anyone can always find an available space wherever they go. Most markets depend on prices to allocate resources, but cities have tried to manage parking almost entirely without prices. Third, to make charging market prices for curb pricing politically feasible, cities should spend the resulting curb parking revenue to pay for neighborhood public investment. While reduction in traffic congestion and better air quality will also be the results, Shoup insists that the broader benefits are "like regional icing on the neighborhood cake."

Shoup suggests that parking requirements will go the way of other destructive planning notions such as urban renewal. He cites San Francisco's shift from minimum parking requirements to parking caps in the downtown as a sign of hope.

For more, see: <http://www.bol.ucla.edu/~shoup>

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safety plan for Wheaton Metro station area, Bottigheimer explained that making growth successful around transit stations helps preserve highway capacity – something of interest to many engineers at MDOT. Also presenting were Yolanda Takesian of Kittleston and Associates, a transportation consultants group that has studied Wheaton closely for MDOT, and Joe Davis, director of the Wheaton Redevelopment Program Office of the Montgomery County Mid-County Service Center.

Examining issues illustrated by pedestrian access around the Wheaton Metro station area, Bottigheimer discussed how the state and local governments can collaborate to address the conflicts and safety hazards that occur when suburban road networks designed for a suburban past are asked to play new roles as older suburbs evolve into more urbanized activity centers. Bottigheimer explained that the state has developed effective models for addressing linear roadway treatments, and is now grappling with the challenges of pedestrian access in places where state roads provide the frame for rapidly urbanizing communities.

Increasingly, MDOT recognizes that to achieve its transportation and pedestrian safety goals within its right-of-way, it will need to collaborate with the agencies and stakeholders that control the development environment outside of that right-of-way. This approach brings neighborhood, business, planning, transit agency, public safety, and public works agency points of view to the table. But Bottigheimer explained, pedestrian planning needs to begin by acknowledging that transportation planning traditionally has had moving vehicular traffic as its goal.

“For us [MDOT], getting involved in these kinds of collaborative efforts provides a basic security that the transportation needs won’t get lost—and at the same time, if we can support a broader view of what promotes pedestrian safety, it can encourage other stakeholders to come to the table,” Bottigheimer said. “Without those stakeholders, you won’t necessarily have a handle on what’s coming down the pike in the future.”

“MDOT is bombarded with contradictory requests for pedestrian safety,” he said. “One benefit of the of developing a coordinated, collaborative strategy is to give a blueprint for future responses to public input.” Rather than offering one single, large, costly improvement, a coordinated network of smaller improvements offers an opportunities to see progress more quickly.

While the study drew in a variety of state and local government planners, the exercise emphasized working with and learning from local residents as the “real” transportation experts, according to Yolanda Takesian.

The area is typical of inner suburban communities where street networks after World War II emphasized disconnectivity and lack of redundancy, forcing all traffic onto arterials, said Takesian. The area, however, appears to have a significant number of people with disabilities, which Takesian attributes to a combination of good access to Metro, major bus routes, stores and relatively affordable housing. Another characteristic of the area was striking—low auto ownership rates. In general, 60 percent of households own only one car. In one census tract, cover more than 20 percent of households own no vehicle.

Working with a broad group of community volunteers, the study inventoried intersections, signalized and mid-block crossings, street segments, bus stops, generators of pedestrian traffic such as pathways to and from the Metro station, bus stops and stores. The inventory collected data on pedestrian crashes and volumes of pedestrians and vehicular traffic. The pedestrian safety goals for the study were to support logical pathways, key connections, and pedestrian crossing safety. In addition, the study sought to enhance transit stop location and amenities, improve vehicle safety and wayfinding, and strengthen the walking environment.

Takesian noted that increasing the amount of residences and stores, and reorienting buildings to relate better to the sidewalk and street, thereby creating a sense of place, solves many of the problems caused by automobile-scaled suburban environments. In suburban environments, motorists do not see pedestrians because they don’t really belong there, Takesian said. A more pedestrian-oriented environment creates slower traffic and increases safety.

After inventorying pedestrian issues in Wheaton with community volunteers, MDOT and Wheaton-area stakeholders prepared a plan for successful pedestrian circulation. Key recommendations include: tightening curb radii to reduce crossing distance and vehicle speeds; restricting right turns on red; removing a travel lane; and providing corner bulb-outs or bus-only lanes. The plan proposes extending Ennalls Avenue into Westfield Shoppingtown mall with new signals and pedestrian crossings, and recommended reconfiguring Veirs Mill Road/ Georgia Avenue to a four legged intersection, eliminating free-flowing vehicle movements, and providing crosswalks. The plan advises minimizing auto priority at conflict points with pedestrians, and seeks to dignify the transit experience, minimize off-street parking impacts, and refine the quality of pedestrian paths.

Joe Davis from the Wheaton Redevelopment Program

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discussed some of the challenges for implementation of the plan, but emphasized that the recommendations allow for short-term and long-term improvements. Stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and developers, are committed to seeing the improvements implemented he said. Westfield Shoppingtown mall, however, has not accepted the Ennalls Avenue extension proposal into the mall parking lot, and has proposed an extra turn lane into the mall. The presenters agreed that changing the mall owners' view of pedestrians will take more time.

Responding to a question, Bottigheimer noted that there's no reason MDOT couldn't allow an intersection to move from a "B" level of service to a lower performing "C" level of service for vehicles, as long as if the huge benefits for pedestrians can be demonstrated and consensus can be built around balancing competing and valid interests in favor of pedestrian improvements.

"Right now, we don't have a widely accepted way of comparing benefits to pedestrians with impacts to traffic," he said. "The question is, how do you balance these two things, and how does the development setting affect how you balance these things?"

"At a minimum, we need good metrics for the benefits and impacts for both pedestrians and motor vehicles. We have pretty good metrics on the traffic side, but could use better information on the pedestrian environment side. Montgomery County's new transportation review guidelines for development projects require an evaluation of impacts on pedestrians, and this is a good step forward, especially in light of the county's high pedestrian accident rate," he said.

Thanks!

WRN wishes to thank the following friends of WRN for their generous contributions: Francis Stewart, James Hubbard, Kathryn Stratos, Tom Whitley.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Tuesday, May 24, 5:30 pm. "The Affordable Housing Landscape," Part I of "The Affordable Housing Crisis in DC," A three part series on the crisis, role of government, and legal action in the community sponsored by Washington Council of Lawyers. Howard University Law School, Moot Court Room, 2900 Van Ness Street, NW. To RSVP & for information, see: www.washingtoncounciloflawyers.org.

Thursday, May 26, 2005, 6:00 pm Refreshments; 6:30 pm Program. WRN forum: "Arlington Responds to Affordable Housing Challenges" with Chris Zimmerman, Vice Chair, Arlington County Board. National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), 401 9th Street, NW, North Lobby, Suite 500. RSVP: staff@washingtonregion.net, tel. 202-244-1105.

Thursday, June 2. Sierra Club flyering at D.C. Metro Stations to push for eight car trains and more funding for better bus and rail service. Contact Chris Carney at 202-237-0754 or email: chris.carney@sierraclub.org.

Tuesday June 7, 6:30-8:30 pm. Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance's event "We've Won...We've Only Just Begun" will inform advocates and community members about the housing trust fund victories around the region and what are the next steps. Westminster Presbyterian Church, 2701 Cameron Mills Road, Alexandria, VA 22302. Contact: herbel@rpjhousing.org.

Wednesday, June 8 at 7:00 pm – 9:30 pm. Loudoun Community Visioning Exercise by Piedmont Environmental Council to develop an alternative to the Loudoun Board of Supervisors' idea of growth for the area. Arcola Elementary, 24328 Goshen Road Aldie, Virginia 20105. For more information, contact: Rebecca Perring, e-mail: rebecca@smartergrowth.net, or tel. 202-244-4408 ext 6#.

Monday, June 20, 2005, 2:00 pm - 4:15 pm. "Schools & Communities: A National Forum," hosted by the Smart Schools, Smart Growth Initiative Speakers include: Thomas Hylton, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Pottstown, PA, Jonathan Ratner, Project director for Forest City Stapleton, Denver, CO, and Don Chen, Smart Growth America. George Washington University Marvin Center, Room 403, 800 21st Street, NW (Foggy Bottom Metro). Registration required – e-mail: forum@smart-schools.org, or call Melissa Houghton, 301-891-1899.

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