

McLean Citizens Association



One Hundred Years and Counting

November 30, 2020

Supervisor John W. Foust  
Dranesville District  
Fairfax County  
1437 Balls Hill Road  
McLean, VA 22101

RE: McLean Community Business Center Comprehensive Plan

Dear Supervisor Foust:

As you know, the McLean Community Business Center (CBC) Task Force is winding down after two and one-half years of work with County Staff on the revision of the Comprehensive Plan for the McLean CBC. As a Task Force participant, I can attest to the dedication and time that both Task Force members and Staff gave to the project, trying to find a new Plan that will both attract redevelopment and address community interests.

At this time, as the Task Force Chair Kim Olson Dorgan recently suggested, it is time to step back and take a look at the Plan draft language and underlying concepts on an overall basis. It is time to identify specifically what can improve on the draft to address community interests more completely.

The McLean Citizens Association (MCA) did just that, based on a vote of its Board of Directors. Our Planning & Zoning; Environment, Parks & Recreation; and Transportation Committees spent several weeks reviewing the October 5, 2020 draft plan text and background materials. They identified issues of interest and concern, researched and debated them and selected a number of issues for presentation to the MCA Board. On November 18, 2020, the MCA Board held a meeting to discuss 16 issues<sup>1</sup> raised by the Committees and to select the most important issues through a weighted vote. (A copy of the ballot is attached.)

We recognize that the current version of the plan is largely the product of Task Force votes, compromise decisions and Staff input. Nevertheless, we also believe it is critical that MCA member views be considered to ensure a final Comprehensive Plan that best meets the interests of residents of Greater McLean. Based on our view of what would both attract redevelopment and address important community interests and concerns, we offer five recommendations for changes that the MCA believes would make the final Plan better. These are, in order of importance, based on the MCA Board members' votes:

**Parking:** Issue: Automobile parking needs to be retained as a key, continuing feature of the CBC, as other means of transport are generally not practical for people coming from other neighborhoods to patronize establishments in the CBC. Action Item: Measures that would reduce the availability, or increase the difficulty, of parking in the CBC by non-residents of the CBC should not be included in the CBC

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<sup>1</sup> The Transportation Committee withdrew Issue 16 before the Board voted.

Plan. The Parking Management section of the Draft CBC Plan (pages 30-31) should be eliminated or, at a minimum, should not contain provisions promoting the use of paid parking or of off-peak, on-street parking, which could lead to lane blockage and hazardous driving conditions. Surface parking should not be discouraged, especially in the general and edge zones, and sufficient parking spaces should be available in structured parking to allow non-residents convenient access to establishments.

**Center & General Zone Density:** Issue: The CBC Plan needs to include maximum building heights. Action Item: Maximum building heights with the stated assumptions on number of stories and floor heights, and with ADU/WDU housing bonuses and MPH allowances: Center Zone: 146 feet height maximum (McLean House height); provided, 1 building on a 4-6 acre assemblage with a 171 feet height maximum, provided a 2/3rd acre civic plaza/park is proffered. General Zone: 90 feet height maximum (The Palladium height) with the same stated assumptions.

**Stormwater Management:** Issue: The draft McLean CBC plan does not reflect a sufficiently strong commitment to Green Infrastructure (GI) nor does it acknowledge the extreme inadequacy of existing stormwater mitigation in the CBC area, abundance of impervious surfaces in the CBC, and county-documented evidence of citizen concerns and complaints about flooding and streambank erosion immediately downstream of the CBC area along Saucy Branch and Pimmit Run. Action Item: Demonstrate a firm commitment to GI as a key component of CBC redevelopment and stormwater design, similar to the Tysons Comprehensive Plan at pages 79-81. At a minimum, include requirements for all of the following: a) Patchworks of natural areas, green streetscapes and alleys, bioswales and bioretention areas, planter boxes (urban rain gardens), permeable pavements, green roofs, green streets, use of natural landscaping in all stormwater remediation planted areas, and underground runoff storage vaults where appropriate; and b) A requirement for new developments that "at a minimum, the first inch of rainfall should be retained on-site through infiltration, evapotranspiration and/or reuse" with overflow provisions to accommodate significantly larger rainfall events; and c) a requirement that, for new developments in densely built areas, stormwater management measures that are sufficient to attain the stormwater-related credits of the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) or equivalent rating system.

**Need for CBC Guiding Planning Principles that provide a framework for environmental stewardship:** Issue: The draft CBC plan has adverse environmental consequences due to the extent of urbanization – consequences that are broad, unacknowledged, and unaccounted for (e.g., air, noise, and water pollution, traffic, increased runoff, and flooding, loss of wildlife habitat, and adverse human health effects, adverse effects commonly associated with urbanization). The demonstrated lack of environmental stewardship and commitment to sustainability in the draft CBC plan is not aligned to Fairfax County's Environmental Vision, and is much weaker than that expressed in the introduction to the Tysons Comprehensive Plan. Action Item: Create CBC Guiding Planning Principles that limit the extent of urbanization and attempt to retain the suburban character of downtown while providing a framework for environmental stewardship actions in the McLean CBC and immediate vicinity, similar to that expressed in the Tysons Comprehensive Plan.

**Civic Park/Plaza:** Issue: An important element of the 2018 CBC Vision Plan was an attractively landscaped civic park/plaza at the heart of the Center Zone, with ground floor restaurants and retail along its edges. This was to be 2/3 acre achieved through 4- 6 acre lot consolidation. The current CBC draft reduces the size of the civic park/plaza to 1/2 acre. Action Item: The civic park/plaza should be restored to 2/3 acre.

We urge inclusion of these changes into the final Plan to be adopted by the County and stand ready to answer any questions or to discuss our positions.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Rob Jackson, President  
McLean Citizens Association

Copies to: John Ulfelder  
Kim Olson Dorgan  
Participating County Staff  
Ben Wiles  
Task Force Members