

FHCA Development Committee Update

June 29, 2018

From: Andrea Hoffman, Chair Forest Hills Development Committee

RE: Arlington County Transportation Commission (TC) Meeting on 6-28-18

Agenda Item #4 - Amend the Master Transportation Map (MTP)

Dear FHCA Residents:

A sincere thank you to all the residents who attended Thursday evening's hearing. Your participation had a powerful impact on the conversation. Because of our strong showing, the Commissioners engaged and took a critical interest in the issues we presented. Jan Gilbert, Frank Stearns, and Susan Sheldon joined me in addressing the Commissioners. Without a doubt, they each gave compelling, articulate, and informed presentations. We Thank You!

The outcome of the hearing exceeded expectations due to the energy and dynamics of the Forest Hills participation and the clear and compelling arguments made by the speakers.

The win for Forest Hills came in the form of a lengthy discussion and profound concern, expressed by some Commissioners, that proposed Townhome community may be inappropriate on the R-10 (single family) zoned lots. Some Commissioners even suggested to the Developers (who attended) that they should revise their plans and pursue the development of 1-3 single family homes on the lot (a "by-right" use of the land). That's significant.

The Developers received a strong signal from the more experienced members of the Commission that changing zoning, or building a townhome community, would be a long and difficult battle.

We did not expect to stop the amendment to the MTP. Our goal was to raise the critical issues of zoning, environmental impact, fairness and viability of a 45-year old easement supporting a new townhome development, and share our community opposition to the plan. While these issues weren't expected to impact the technical action of the TC's work to amend the MTP, our presentations and homeowner attendance definitely highlighted the need for serious concern and critical examination of the project. Commissioners, especially if they are on alternate County Commissions, have more information to act and support the FHCA position.

TC Commissioner Audrey Clement, who had originally planned on abstaining from the vote, stated she learned enough during the hearing to vote. She spoke forcefully against the Amendment arguing "the commission is putting the cart before the horse" in amending the MTP. She added that the land is not zoned for a townhome community and Forest Hills is already overwhelmed by the current density of the neighborhood. Traffic and safety concerns are within the scope of the TC and she felt the amendment opened the door for a problematic, unsuitable development. She suggested the commission did not have adequate information or assurances from the Developer. Audrey Clement and Sandra Bushue voted against amending the MTP.

The TC Chair, Chris Slatt, implied the Commission, for the purposes of Amending the MTP, did not have the jurisdiction to tie the business of updating the MTP to policing the conceptual plans of developers. Ultimately, developer plans needed to go through the planning/zoning/permitting processes and they can't do that unless they have access to a road on the MPT. Slatt went on to add:

1. Property owners have a right to access public streets (the alternative easement arguments fell flat. Not that we expected an alternative - but we mentioned it in the context that the Developers were not forthcoming with the Commission on the full scale and scope of the number of lots required to build 12 townhomes. There was very little sympathy for 45 year old easement not being fair or viable. FHCA maintains the easement Van Metre gave to the county was not intended as a 40' road capable of supporting a townhome community.

2. The procedural scope of amending the MTP precludes any conditions on the types of construction projects being proposed. For instance, Slatt gave the example the Developer could have asked for the "request to advertise" and the amendment to the MTP based on a single family home. Yet tomorrow, start the zoning/planning/permit process for a townhome community. Amending the MTP does NOT mean the county will start building a road or commit to a certain type of proposed development. The MTP, from the County perspective, signifies they have a right to build at a specific location to give a future development sites, if approved, access to a road. The MPT can be amended if the development plans later change under the more burdensome requirements and oversight related to zoning/planning/permitting processes.

Final Vote Commission Vote to Amend MTP: 6-2

NEXT HEARING – CRITICAL

Planning Commission
Monday, July 2 at 7:00 PM
2100 Clarendon Blvd
3rd Floor Hearing Room

The Planning Commission will consider the Amendment to the MTP. The Planning Commission (PC) is very different from the TC in that it has different oversight, jurisdiction, and powers. The PC CAN take a position on the appropriateness of a proposed development within a community. The Chair, Jane Siegel, and others on PC may be more receptive to our position and issues and have latitude to act with regard to the MTP amendment.

Attendance at this Hearing is critical. Your participation will elevate the mood, dialogue, and importance the Commission gives this issue. While stopping the amendment is challenging, getting County Commissioners on record as having concerns and objections chips away at the plan before it has a chance to take off.

The Transportation Commission hearing afforded us an opportunity to hear new Developer insights regarding their "affordable housing" development and prepare for July 2.

For More Information Contact:

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