



The Washington, DC region is great >> and it can be greater.

Most growth happening in “walkable urban” neighborhoods

DEVELOPMENT By [Dan Reed](#) (Editorial Board) September 6, 2012  85

In recent years, apartment and office towers have sprouted up around Greater Washington, in inner-city neighborhoods and suburban town centers alike. According to a new report from [LOCUS](#), a smart growth advocacy group, these “walkable urban” places are actually driving the region’s growth.



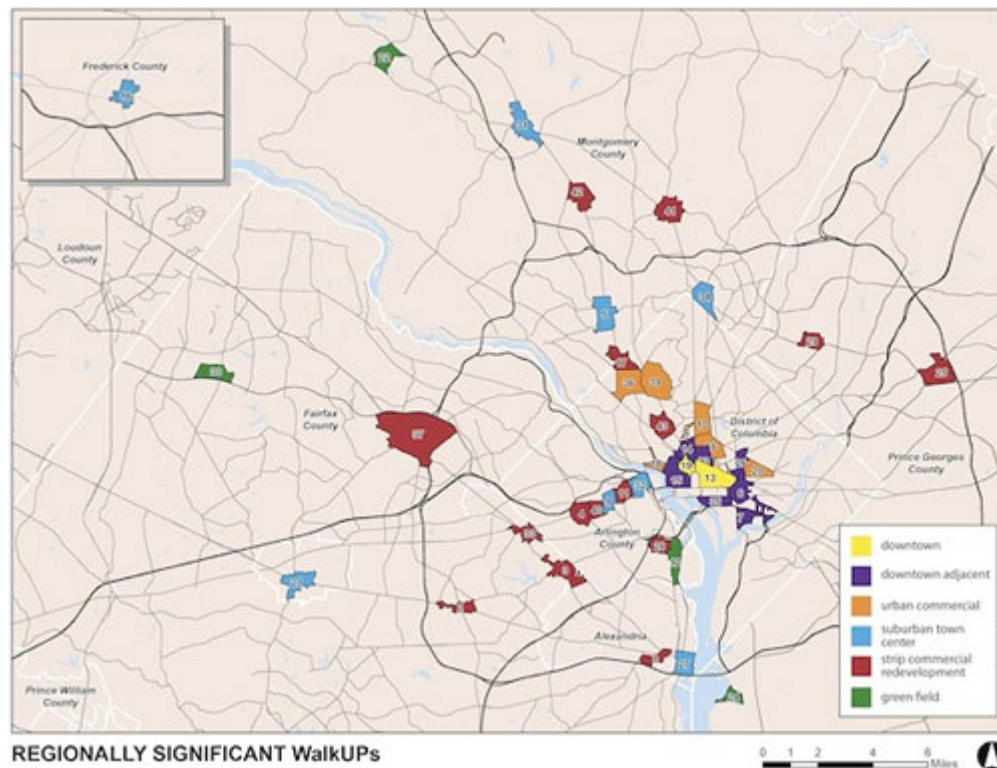
People want “walkable urban” places like this, and developers are responding. Photo by the author.

The report won’t be released until [a conference](#) next week on the future of DC-area real estate, but the *Wall Street Journal* [has a preview](#):

Since 2009, these walkable locations in the Washington area have seen 42% of new apartment development, up dramatically from 19% between 2000 and 2008, and 12% during the 1990s. A similar change was seen for offices, as 59% of the space delivered since 2009 was in these areas, up from 49% between 2000 and 2008 and 38% in the 1990s. ...

To [Christopher] Leinberger, a developer himself, the shift for apartments and offices is a function of the market: Developers are getting higher rents in denser areas, leading to rising values compared with typical suburban-style development. “That’s the market telling you, dramatically, build more of this stuff,” Mr. Leinberger said. “There’s pent-up demand for walkable urban.”

Leinberger identifies include 43 “walkable urban” places, which are both “regionally significant” and meet a set of criteria for walkability. The places span everything from Columbia Heights in the District to inner suburbs like downtown Silver Spring and even satellite cities like [downtown Frederick](#). As *The Atlantic Cities* [notes](#), these “walkable urban” places take up less than 1% of the land in Greater Washington but already have a third of the region’s jobs.



*43 “regionally significant” neighborhoods where development is concentrated.
Map from The Atlantic Cities.*

Whether or not you personally want to live in an urban neighborhood, this report is good news. Increased demand to build in areas with existing infrastructure can reinvigorate struggling communities. It can also save local governments a tremendous amount of money compared to development on the fringe where roads, utility lines, and schools may not already exist.

We know that there’s an [unmet demand](#) for housing in neighborhoods with public transit and other amenities within an easy walk, so those people could get the opportunity to live in the kind of communities they want. Meanwhile, those who prefer a suburban or rural lifestyle will be able to

have that in communities that may see reduced development pressure in the coming years. And as Leinberger points out, the [glut of large houses in suburban areas](#) built in recent years means that they’ll be more affordable as well.

The challenge, then, is ensuring that everyone who wants to live in a “walkable urban” place [gets the opportunity](#) to do so. These neighborhoods are likely to have housing costs, and though they’re [often offset by low transportation costs](#), we have to make sure that [renters and homeowners alike](#) aren’t priced out, even when there’s [substantial neighborhood opposition](#) to new housing.



Kids hanging out in Kentlands, a “walkable urban” neighborhood in Gaithersburg. Photo by the author.

It’s also important to make sure that our urban neighborhoods are the best they can be. We need to make sure they get [high-quality public spaces](#) that make up for the lack of private space and allow people to come together. The region’s towns, cities and counties would do well to follow the District’s lead and get developers and police officers together to ensure that new neighborhoods are [designed for safety](#).

We also have to ensure that people of all ages, not just [young adults](#), are welcome in our urban neighborhoods. These places have [lots of potential benefits](#) for kids, but only if they have the right amenities [to draw families](#) who may otherwise look to suburban areas.

Greater Washington isn't the only region in North America that's moving towards a more urban future, but it's probably the furthest along in shifting growth to urban places instead of suburban ones. Hopefully, this report will serve as a wake-up call to both the potential our area has and the challenges it will face.

Continue the conversation about urbanism in the Washington region and support GGWash's news and advocacy when you [join the GGWash Neighborhood!](#)

Tagged: [christopher leinberger](#), [development](#), [pedestrians](#), [smart growth](#), [walkability](#)



Dan Reed is an urban planner and freelance writer. Check out his regular column in [Washingtonian](#) and his blog, [Just Up the Pike](#). He's also an agent at [Living In Style Real Estate](#). Dan still gets a full night's sleep. He lives in downtown Silver Spring. All opinions are his own.

85 COMMENTS

THREADED NEWEST AT BOTTOM NEWEST AT TOP

charlie on September 6, 2012 at 10:50 am

I still stay this is mostly about financing.

1) A good chunk of Americans are 1) un(der)employed, don't have the money for a down payment, or have a very impaired credit history. This is also very true for what would be first time buyers.

2) You only option is renting.

3) Renting makes the most sense in multi-unit buildings.

And double that down that as a developer, it is far easier to get financing to build an apartment building than anything else.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[Ben Ross](#) on September 6, 2012 at 11:01 am

@charlie - The effect of financing is to promote sprawl. Cookie-cutter strip malls, garden apartments, and tract houses on greenfields are much easier to finance than infill. Chris Leinberger's book has an extended discussion of this.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[jnb](#) on September 6, 2012 at 11:01 am

I just spoke with a tech skill/transportation planning professional in his 30s from Philadelphia who wants to relocate to DC. The reason was basically that DC provides an increasingly active urban environment. He thought Philly had potential but it was just not happening fast enough.

The thing that DC has going is a place-making program that appeals to the same kind of people who are driving economic growth. Place-making \Leftrightarrow market \Leftrightarrow growth. Obviously, this formula doesn't work everywhere, but it's a virtuous circle in this region. It's not just, or even exclusively, underemployment.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[redline sos](#) on September 6, 2012 at 11:12 am

You know...I just moved from Silver Spring to Montreal for grad school. Silver Spring is not a walkable neighborhood. Plateau in Montreal is a walkable neighborhood.

America needs fewer chain grocery stores and more bakers, butchers, and specialty food stores. I'm amazed at the difference. DC could learn a lot from the neighborhoods here in Montreal

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[dan reed!](#) on September 6, 2012 at 11:18 am

@redline sos

I've been to Montreal and I love it - especially the public markets and grocery stores that were bigger than a corner store but way smaller than a supermarket. It's a great city and sets a high standard for any place that seeks to become “walkable” or “urban.”

That said, while walking in Silver Spring (or many of the new town centers popping up around DC) isn't always the best experience, there's a lot of potential. After all, there's already plenty of stuff within walking distance. You just have to make the experience of walking better.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

charlie on September 6, 2012 at 11:25 am

@benross: [~~Deleted for violating the [comment policy](#).~~]

Ask any developer about getting financing for a new subdivision.

Then ask them about building an apartment building.

Likewise, the point I was making is a good chunk of Americans, and a majority of people in the market for a first home, can't get financing to buy one. Renting is their second best option.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

AWalkerInTheCity on September 6, 2012 at 11:26 am

Some folks are certainly going to say that you need to show data on total residential development, including SFHs, as part of the “Loudoun is growing even faster meme”

While I don't doubt that the development dominance of WUPs will be far less viewed that way, I suspect the DIRECTION of change will be reinforced by that. I think it would be good for Mr Leinberger to add those numbers, if only to preempt that counterattack.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

VA Square on September 6, 2012 at 11:29 am

It's impossible to prevent people from being priced out of walkable locations. It's simple supply and demand. People don't mind spending more to live in a convenient and safe area. That's why I bought in walking distance of the orange line in Arlington. It's the old saying that in the DC area you get to pick two out of three: affordable, safe, location.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

movement on September 6, 2012 at 11:31 am

@redline

The European experience of having to go to 19 stores to get all of your stuff sucks unless you have an inordinate amount of free time, e.g. you're a college student or a homemaker. As for Montreal, nice place to visit, wouldn't want to live there.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

tmtfairfax on September 6, 2012 at 12:02 pm

Mr. Reed:

You state urban development “can also save local governments a tremendous amount of money compared to development on the fringe where roads, utility lines, and schools may not already exist.” In theory, “yes,” and in some locations, “yes.” But Tysons disproves the “smart growth” myth, at least for large-scale redevelopment.

Just for roads and non-rail transit, Fairfax County says it needs \$3.1 billion to make Tysons a fully urban center. Excluding transit, the needed amount is still \$2.3 billion. Those amounts are in 2102 dollars and exclude any interest on bonds and the costs for extending the Orange Line to at least Centreville and for building one, yet not identified additional heavy rail line. When inflation is considered, the first price tag jumps to \$5.46 billion.

Tysons has clearly been the most studied urban redevelopment project. Fairfax County won the prestigious Daniel Burnham Award for its planning. The County's DOT is on the cutting edge of transportation analysis work. It's looking at the cumulative effect of high-quality, mixed use development; transit; and extremely aggressive TOD measures on transportation needs. Moreover, it's analyzing the data on a short road segment and individual intersection basis. Fairfax County staff's view of what is needed for urban redevelopment is likely the most accurate available. The bottom line is large scale urban redevelopment is extremely expensive and could create huge, new tax burdens that no one wants to carry. This includes the landowners.

Second, pushing development to less dense suburbs and exurbs also pushes much of the costs from taxpayers in more established areas to taxpayers in other local jurisdictions. In other words, more development in Fairfax County burdens Fairfax County taxpayers; but more development outside Fairfax County puts those tax burdens much more on non-Fairfax County residents. Why would Fairfax County residents not want to see the tax burdens shifted outside the county?

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

thump on September 6, 2012 at 12:08 pm

@movement-Why does it “suck”? It seems like Europeans simply don't buy everything at once..unless they go to a huge store. They buy what they need for a few days. When you're talking about food, that's a better way to do it. You eat fresher, and waste less. Saving money by not throwing out a bunch of expired food doesn't suck.

REPLY LINK REPORT

AWalkerInTheCity on September 6, 2012 at 12:11 pm

“Fairfax County says it needs \$3.1 billion to make Tysons a fully urban center”

Thats including the 300 million to widen Rte 7, which you yourself have said is needed even if there NO new development in Tysons. I have no idea how many other projects on that list are also not truely caused by Tysons growth.

“Fairfax County staff's view of what is needed for urban redevelopment is likely the most accurate available”

except that the staff cannot stop the pols from putting projects that would be needed anyway on the list.

You also omit increases in property valuation and tax revenues for fairfax county properties located outside Tysons. There are wide areas of southern fairfax that are commutable to Tysons, but not commutable to areas (such as in Loudoun) with which Tysons is in competition. That is a value to FFX county beyond the revenues to be collected with in Tysons itself. You dont happen to live in southern Fairfax, do you?

I also find it odd that you indicate “Tysons disproves the “smart growth” myth,” yet you have said that you think the redevelopment is a good idea.

REPLY LINK REPORT

drumz on September 6, 2012 at 12:13 pm

@tmtfairfax

2 things:

1. Costs are high but what evidence is there that costs would be lower if spread to elsewhere in fairfax (or beyond)? And aren't part of the higher costs due to it being a retrofit rather than greenfield? So yes, it is expensive the question is: how is the alternative cheaper?

2. regarding your second point, yes there is a possibility of pushing costs onto other jurisdictions but what about the tradeoffs? If I live in Fairfax and work in Tysons, it wouldn't really benefit me (all things being equal) if a transportation project (or a company) moved somewhere else? I'm not saying this is true across the board but there has to be some recognition that these tax burdens are preferable to jobs/infrastructure moving out of the county.

REPLY LINK REPORT

AWalkerInTheCity on September 6, 2012 at 12:28 pm

drumz

<http://greatergreaterwashington.org/post/15275/what-happens-if-loudoun-drops-out-of-metro/>

TMT has admitted (assuming someone is not impersonating him) that the widening of route 7 is being done, not at the choice of FFX county planners, but due to local politics (mostly with the aim of reducing cut through traffic on Great Falls Rd) It will happen even if there is not a drop of incremental development at Tysons (as TMT says “who will turn that around?”) To state that its inclusion on the project list means its an incremental cost of the Tysons redevelopment is incorrect. And I dont think anyone official has ever stated that those projects are strictly incremental to Tysons. TMT has repeated these numbers a great deal, and clearly intends to continue to do so, despite the refutation of his interpretation. he will also not tell you about the legitimate debate about the likely non-auto mode share - merely suggesting anyone who disagrees with the conservative projections of transit share is “ideological”

I can no longer take anything he says about the Tysons project seriously.

FYI there are a significant number of FFX homeowners who live in the Reston area, who have good access to jobs in areas from Reston to LoCo that directly compete with the Tysons redevelopment, who will be directly impacted by the DRT fees, and who fear large scale TOD close to there homes.

REPLY LINK REPORT

AWalkerInTheCity on September 6, 2012 at 12:35 pm

this is what TMT has said

“Re Route 7. Yes, there is a reference to Route 7 in Table 7. It must be improved by 2030. But it was also in the 1994 Plan. Why? Because of traffic volumes on Route 7. Source: Dan Alcorn, chair, Tysons Task Force (1990s). “

Rte 7 must be widened because of traffic volumes on rte 7 INDEPENDENT of the Tysons redevelopment. ANd was in the 1994 plan. The table 7 plan is NOT a list of incremental projects needed only to “make Tysons a fully urban center. “

It is a convenient place to dump projects that are required, or at least desired, anyway.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

Falls Church on September 6, 2012 at 12:41 pm

@tmtfairfax

1. While the costs are higher for development in Tysons, so are the benefits. You could spend less money creating the infrastructure in Loudoun, PW, etc. but it would result in fewer high paying jobs and wealthy residents. The projection for Tysons is 100K new jobs (many of them \$100K plus jobs) and 200K new residents (many of them wealthy).

2. While the costs of infrastructure are higher in Tysons, the increase in property value is greater. The projection for increased property value in Tysons ALONE is \$10B.

3. The reason Fairfax would want to spend money to create infrastructure in Fairfax, rather than letting development occur in Loudoun/PW is that Fairfax wants the jobs and tax revenue that infrastructure leads to. Fairfax will also benefit from the addition of 100K jobs in Tysons because highly skilled people (like tech workers) like to live some place where there are plentiful job opportunities for their specialized skill set. That gives them a wider pool of jobs to choose from and makes job-hopping (something most high potential tech workers do to get ahead and broaden their experience) much easier.

Overall, you've done a good job laying out the costs of development in Tysons but haven't mentioned the benefits, which very importantly, exceed the costs.

Why would Fairfax County residents not want to see the tax burdens shifted outside the county?

Because then the benefits (increased property values, job availability and tax revenue) will also be shifted outside the county. For example, if your house appreciates by \$50K, it would take about 100 years of paying property taxes for the increased tax burden to equal the gain in property value.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

AWalkerInTheCity on September 6, 2012 at 1:07 pm

“Overall, you've done a good job laying out the costs of development in Tysons”

both the costs that are actually incremental to development in Tysons, and also those that are not.

Unless the 3.1 billion excludes the Rte 7 widening and any other projects needed anyway, which I doubt.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

Falls Church on September 6, 2012 at 1:20 pm

@TMT

One other note. I think some of it comes down to personal preference. One strategy is slow-growth and keep things uncrowded. That has historically been Maryland's strategy which has resulted in fewer jobs created but less risk from investing tax revenue in job creating infrastructure.

The other strategy is high-growth, business friendliness. That's traditionally been the Virginia way, as VA has consistently ranked #1 or #2 as best states for business (CNBC does the most widely acknowledged rankings). However, notably, VA dropped to #3 this year largely because our infrastructure score dropped as growth outpaces infrastructure development.

So, the question is whether you want to follow the MD or VA strategy. I'd say that our pro-growth strategy has worked pretty darn well so far and if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

While I disagree with Gov. McDonnell on a lot of things, I do agree that job creation should be VA's #1 priority. The Tysons/Reston infrastructure projects are a great way to execute that priority.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

Falls Church on September 6, 2012 at 1:26 pm

Here's the info on VA dropping to #3 (and almost to #4).

Virginia is no longer the top state for business, falling to third place in CNBC's sixth annual study, “America's Top States for Business.”

Virginia, which has won the CNBC study three times over the years, suffered from steep declines in categories such as Transportation and Cost of Doing

Business, and barely edged out North Carolina for the third spot.

Contrast us to Texas:

The Lone Star State makes a triumphant return as America’s Top State for Business—its third time at the top of our rankings.

In addition to the top spot overall, Texas has the nation’s best Infrastructure, according to our study

[http://www.cnbc.com/id/48123097/Virginia Falls to Third in CNBC s - Top States for Business 2012](http://www.cnbc.com/id/48123097/Virginia_Falls_to_Third_in_CNBC_s_Top_States_for_Business_2012)

[http://www.cnbc.com/id/47818860/Texas Is America s Top State - for Business 2012](http://www.cnbc.com/id/47818860/Texas_Is_America_s_Top_State_for_Business_2012)

REPLY LINK REPORT

[David Alpert](#) on September 6, 2012 at 1:32 pm

A lot of these “business friendly” rankings are [pretty much bogus](#). They reflect a bunch of policy priorities of the organization that creates them, priorities which often only partly or scarcely overlap with actual needs for business.

The SBEC ones, for instance, give points for roads but none for transit, or for offering school choice and vouchers but not for actual school quality. And that one demotes areas for having more government workers for no particular valid reason.

REPLY LINK REPORT

[drumz](#) on September 6, 2012 at 2:05 pm

I’ll say that while despite the general veracity of a particular list there is a widespread perception that Va is very business friendly and willing to make infrastructure upgrades to keep up. I’m ok with this because the recent pushes are beginning to see transit as equal or more beneficial than widening roads. I’m ok with this. It’s not necessarily the costs of the roads but also their impacts on the environment/livability vs. the same impacts that come from transit.

And we should remember, Tysons is already an urban center. The redevelopment is to make it more of an official center with the things that generally recognized to help make a city successful (transit, places to go besides your office, sidewalks and so forth).

REPLY LINK REPORT

dcseain on September 6, 2012 at 2:06 pm

Most of the cut-through traffic on Georgetown Pike (VA 193) is due to that road going where many of us West of it's intersection with Leesburg Pike (VA 7) want to go, as opposed to 7, which puts us further south, rather than volumes on 7.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

Falls Church on September 6, 2012 at 2:11 pm

@Alpert

I'd agree that a lot of “business friendly” rankings are bogus. Especially when they're done by organizations that have a political motive like the one referenced in your link. That study was done by an org that promotes de-regulation and their “study” is just another way of scoring political points.

However, the CNBC study is widely acknowledged in the business community as accurate. Businesses make decisions in part on information like this from CNBC, and that news station (owned by NBC, which is not known to skew right if it skews at all) has built it's entire reputation on providing businesses/investors with accurate information. When it comes to reporting actionable business info (like these rankings), CNBC and Bloomberg are regarded the best.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

Falls Church on September 6, 2012 at 2:23 pm

Also, “business friendliness” is actually different from “best states for business”. Business friendliness generally refers to things like regulatory burden, easy of starting a business, and generally whether government skews toward business.

In the CNBC rankings, business friendliness is only one component of the score. Things that you'd think a liberal government would prioritize constitute 5 of the 10 criteria. Specifically:

Workforce—Many states point with great pride to the quality and availability of their workers, as well as government-sponsored programs to train them. We rated states based on the education level of their workforce, as well as the numbers of available workers.

Quality of Life—The best places to do business are also the best places to live. We scored the states on several factors, including local attractions, the crime rate, health care, as well as air and water quality.

Infrastructure—Access to transportation in all its modes is key to getting your products to market and your people on the move. We measured the vitality of each state’s transportation system by the value of goods shipped by air, land and water.

Education—Education and business go hand in hand. Not only do companies want to draw from an educated pool of workers, they want to offer their employees a great place to raise a family. Higher education institutions offer companies a source to recruit new talent, as well as a partner in research and development. We looked at traditional measures of K-12 education including test scores, class size and spending. We also considered the number of higher education institutions in each state.

Innovation—Succeeding in the new economy—or any economy—takes innovation. The top states for business prize innovation, nurture new ideas, and have the infrastructure to support them.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

NikolasM on September 6, 2012 at 2:25 pm

Have you driven around the big cities of Texas? They make me want to slit my wrists they are so depressing. Whenever I visit my parents and sister in Fort Worth I am just amazed at how in your face and unrelenting the highways and access roads and parking lots and endless strip malls and billboards are. It is utterly hideous.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

Falls Church on September 6, 2012 at 2:25 pm

For infrastructure, they also looked at: We looked at the availability of air travel in each state, and the quality of the roads.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

Falls Church on September 6, 2012 at 2:28 pm

@NikolasM

Yes, I've driven around Texas. Hard it is for you to believe, many people actually love the way Texas is setup and consider places like NYC “utterly hideous”. There's a wide range in personal preference in the kind of place people like to live.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

movement on September 6, 2012 at 2:36 pm

@thump

The lots-of-specialty-food-stores model sucks because it is terribly inconvenient. Not only do you have to go all over the place to get your stuff, but you have to deal with the shortened hours at these places because they cannot afford to keep the same hours as a supermarket. There is a butcher on Mount Vernon Ave. and I'm sure it is wonderful but by the time I realize I want a steak, it is 7PM and the place is already closed. I'm not going to spend \$15-25/lb for a steak unless I am going to cook it that day.

At least with a Farmer's Market you have a lot of variety in one place.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

NikolasM on September 6, 2012 at 2:45 pm

I can't imagine people would actually proclaim that they love it. More like they don't know anything different. I would say that most of the past 50 years of growth in Texas was built without a semblance of a plan.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

tmtfairfax on September 6, 2012 at 3:50 pm

@ AWalkerInTheCity

Prior to the adoption of the Tyson Comp Plan amendments, VDOT had canceled plans to widen Route 7 west of Tysons because of opposition to the widening by the BoS. As part of the Comp Plan amendments adopted in June 2012, the BoS included widening Route 7 in Table 7 - the necessary transportation improvements needed for Tysons to be redeveloped. If it is not widened, not all of the redevelopment can occur.

Supervisor Foust led the effort to persuade the BoS to reverse its position on widening Route 7 in order to meet the concerns of some of his constituents, mainly in Great Falls. But the County has decided widening Route 7 is necessary for the expansion of Tysons.

County officials agree. On August 27, Fred Selden, Tom Biesiadny and Barbara Byron from Fairfax County all said in a meeting with the McLean Citizens Association (MCA) that Route 7 must be widened west of Tysons for redevelopment to occur. Therefore, I think it is reasonable to state the expansion is necessary for the redevelopment of Tysons. If the County removed the project from Table 7, it would not be fair to state the project is necessary for Tysons redevelopment. I hope this clarifies my position.

Will an urban Tysons generate more tax revenue. Certainly. But will it be enough tax revenue to pay all of the costs plus a fair contribution to other coun-

ty and school operations? We don't know. The MCA has asked the County to state whether it believes real estate taxes will need to be increased to help pay for Tysons infrastructure. Keep in mind that, when one considers inflation, the \$3 billion figure becomes \$5.46 billion, which equals slightly more than \$2 million a week between now and 2051. Will the added residents and businesses pay taxes sufficient to cover that cost? No one within Fairfax County has been willing to answer that question affirmatively. Hence, my concern.

I don't oppose redevelopment at Tysons. It's going to happen as the Comp Plan was amended. I do oppose paying higher taxes, experiencing worse traffic in McLean and Vienna, or more overcrowding in our schools, parks, etc. I do know many people in McLean, Great Falls, Falls Church, & Vienna who strongly oppose any more building in Tysons. Many of these people believe that an urban Tysons will degrade the quality of their neighborhoods and challenge the values of their homes.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[AWalkerInTheCity](#) on September 6, 2012 at 4:25 pm

“If it is not widened, not all of the redevelopment can occur.”

to which, in the past, i said that the widening should be deferred till we see the actual pace of economic growth in Tysons, subject as it is to many economic forces. You responded that it will happen, upfront, because its needed anyway. It may be needed by Tysons redevelopment (and thats why it is on table 7) but it is NOT incremental to Tysons - we would build it whether Tysons grows or not. Ergo, in evaluating the costs and benefits of growing Tysons, we should not include it as a cost. The only things that should be included as costs are things that would not happen in the absence of Tysons redevelopment.

“The MCA has asked the County to state whether it believes real estate taxes will need to be increased to help pay for Tysons infrastructure.” I do not beleive any such pledge has ever been asked of any new development in the county ever before. It is impossible to tell - that there is debate about exactly what IS “tysons infrastructure” makes it harder to tell.

“I don't oppose redevelopment at Tysons. “

Why not, if you beleive it has a negative cost benefit for the county?

No one can

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[tmtfairfax](#) on September 6, 2012 at 5:31 pm

But widening of Route 7 is not going to be deferred. Fairfax County's latest Project Cash Flow analysis (8/27/12) shows engineering for the project will take place from FY13-14 (i.e., now); RoW acquisition FY15-17; with construction from FY18-23. Of course, should the economy slow further or pick up, such that development plans change, the schedule could change as well. I believe FC DOT has discussed this with VDOT, which did not find the schedule to be unreasonable. (BTW, I am not sure the spreadsheet has yet been posted on the County's website.)

Why do I support redevelopment at Tysons? A very fair question. The McLean Citizens Association, to which I belong, has been advocating for a limit of 25% of the total infrastructure costs being borne by County taxpayers. The original proposal would have had County taxpayers paying as much as 58% of the costs. In order to defeat the alternative and increase the odds of gaining a 25% limit (similar to what has been used for Route 28 reconstruction and widening costs), I believe it is necessary to support redevelopment. Also, the MCA was part of the “grand bargain” that resulted in the 2010 Comp Plan amendments, which concentrated the urban development at the four rail stations and did not permit development outside the TOD areas as favored by the Task Force and the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce. The MCA strongly opposed that position and “won” the issue as part of the compromise. I don't think it would be right to back away from the “grand bargain.” Similarly, the MCA is fighting an attempt by some landowners to revisit the deal. I hope this explains things.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[AWalkerInTheCity](#) on September 6, 2012 at 5:39 pm

“But widening of Route 7 is not going to be deferred. “

of course not. Its being built to address current conditions and community desires. Not because of rede velopment at Tysons.

“I don't think it would be right to back away from the “grand bargain.” “

IOW - you think redevelopment is a piss poor idea. but because your org got a deal on the financing and other changes, you feel obligated to not say that in public - a deals a deal. but you beleive that presenting arguments about its costs and benefits, doing so whenever redevelopment at tysons is mentioned in this blog (and elsewhere afaik) even a post like this that was not mostly about Tysons, is somehow respecting the deal, while saying “I am against it” would not be.

I find that very strange.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

ceefer on September 6, 2012 at 5:41 pm

@Falls Church,

You're correct about “absolutely hideous” being relative.

When I lived in Houston for 2 years on TDY, a local woman I dated for a while told me the only thing she remembered about the DC-Baltimore area, in spite of its amenities, was that it was “crowded”, had “horrible traffic”, and getting around was time-consuming.

What do I remember about Houston? That despite its sprawl, one could get anywhere in 30-45 minutes, it had some of the best roads I had ever seen, there was always more than one route to my destination, and the housing was incredibly affordable - in Houston, I lived in the nicest house I've ever owned.

Would I live there again? No. But it's all relative.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

AWalkerInTheCity on September 6, 2012 at 5:46 pm

lets say, for the sake of argument, that the rte 7 widening would not be done in the absence of Tysons redevelopment. Given that it was proposed in 1994, is it fair to say that it has benefits beyond supporting that redevelopment? should not those benefits be included in the Tysons ledger, as well as the project costs?

are there other table 7 projects that also have side benefits, that should be included?

would not the inclusion of those side benefits offset a considerable portion of the costs of the Table 7 projects? have VDOT or FCDOT or FC planning stated they do not have such side benefits?

Everything you have posted here has convinced me that the Tysons redevelopment will have a positive ROI for the County, barring a collapse of the regional economy, and that the arguments against either distort the cost benefit analysis, cherry pick the data wrt mode share, or both. I am hopeful that if the mode share breaks the way we “ideologues” expect, the County will revisit the plan and consider adding additional density.

I am sure that MCA and other opponents, if their concerns are truly those that they have expressed, will also be happy to revisit the plans if the traffic is different from expected.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

tmtfairfax on September 6, 2012 at 6:42 pm

AWalkerInTheCity

What do you forecast the transit mode split to be for Tysons? Do you disagree with Fairfax County's projections in the December 2009 “527 TIA” filed with VDOT? Why? What assumptions are you making as to the number of Silver Line trains that will be run per hour? I don't believe WMATA has released that information yet. We don't know how many of the Orange Line's 17 trains per hour (in each direction) will be shifted to the Silver Line.

If you live in Fairfax County, would you rather pay as much as 58% of the costs for Tysons transportation facilities? If not, you better hope the McLean Citizens Association is successful at obtaining a 25% cap. If not, there won't be much money for transit in other parts of the County and your real estate taxes could increase substantially.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

Nickyp on September 6, 2012 at 10:48 pm

Some people just don't want to live jammed together. Especially in this area with all these mid-rises that are frame structure where you can hear people talking normally in the next apartment. If they're playing music, forget about it. You'll be banging on their door every night.

Not to mention the premium on anything that is even considered close to the metro. But somehow people that by all rights should not be able to afford those places are in there, government subsidies anyone? But if this fiscal cliff thing actually does happen, this whole town will be out of work since everyone either works directly for the federal government or a company that contracts with the federal government. Then we'll see what happens to those \$2000 500 sqft studios near the metro.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

oboe on September 7, 2012 at 8:19 am

@Nickyp:

Not to mention the premium on anything that is even considered close to the metro. But somehow people that by all rights should not be able to afford those places are in there, government subsidies anyone? But if this fiscal cliff thing actually does happen, this whole town will be out of work since everyone either works directly for the federal government or a company that con-

tracts with the federal government. Then we'll see what happens to those \$2000 500 sqft studios near the metro.

I think you've answered your own question: the reason we won't see “this fiscal cliff thing” happen is that essentially the entire power structure that runs this country is on the federal teat. To think that the military-industrial complex will sit idly by as it's unplugged is just a Tea Party fantasy.

The US may be coming to ruin, but the last dollar that comes off the last government printing press is going to line the pocket of a military contractor. To believe otherwise is to misunderstand the nature of the system.

REPLY LINK REPORT

DTSSER@gmail.com on September 7, 2012 at 10:34 am

The challenge, then, is ensuring that everyone who wants to live in a “walkable urban” place gets the opportunity to do so. These neighborhoods are likely to have housing costs, and though they're often offset by low transportation costs, we have to make sure that renters and homeowners alike aren't priced out, even when there's substantial neighborhood opposition to new housing.

Dan, the “new housing” in the “neighborhood opposition to new housing” you linked to are townhouses that are expected to run from between \$600,000 to \$800,000.

It is bad enough that you inserted yourself into a controversy about a neighborhood you know nothing about, relying instead on theories you learned in school to tell that neighborhood what you think is best for it, but there is no reason you should overlook publicly available information about the proposed development, such as what the townhouse units are expected to sell for (with the exception of a small number of MPDU's).

REPLY LINK REPORT

[Alex B.](#) on September 7, 2012 at 10:45 am

DTSSER:

Filtering, my man. Filtering.

<http://www.austincontrarian.com/austincontrarian/2008/06/filtering.html>

If you want more affordable apartments, build more tip-top apartments. Increasing the supply of high-quality apartments lowers the rent for high-quali-

ty apartments, all else being equal. Falling rents for the good units encourage landlords to let the older ones slide into the affordable sub-market.

New supply, even if priced for high incomes, still benefits those seeking affordable housing prices. Why? Because it adds to the total supply, meeting the demand for that kind of housing.

If the new, high-priced stuff isn't built, then you'll see older, more affordable units renovated to capture that demand.

Of course the dynamics are complex and multi-faceted, but the fundamental response to the increase in demand for these areas has to involve increasing the supply.

REPLY LINK REPORT

[*dan reed!*](#) on September 7, 2012 at 10:48 am

@DTSSER

Yes, I have a master's degree in planning. Not to say that makes me smarter than anybody else, but I'm flattered that you don't think I got my ideas out of thin air.

REPLY LINK REPORT

[*AWalkerInTheCity*](#) on September 7, 2012 at 11:05 am

“What do you forecast the transit mode split to be for Tysons?”

I do not have a personal mode split analysis handy. I have seen you however pick an FTA number that had no back up cited, that was lower than what was in the EIS, and that seemed to have been selected by FTA to make as conservative a case as possible for the Silver Line.

“What assumptions are you making as to the number of Silver Line trains that will be run per hour? “

I HOPE it reflects both the experience with Rush plus, and the amount of development delivered when the line opens. And I hope in the months after than they adjust in keeping with the changes to Tysons - both in the amount of space, and the improvements in walkability.

“If you live in Fairfax County, would you rather pay as much as 58% of the costs for Tysons transportation facilities?”

Id always rather pay less for something rather than more. It may be that some folks had to say some innaccurate things about what projects are truly incremental to what in order to make their case for paying less. However if we are going to use those innaccurate statements to A. State that Tysons redevelopment is not a postive ROI project B. State that suburban WUPs in general are not positive (which, let us recall, is the subject of this post, NOT Tysons in particular) well I have a problem with that.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[AWalkerInTheCity](#) on September 7, 2012 at 11:09 am

and let me ask you one more time

“lets say, for the sake of argument, that the rte 7 widening would not be done in the absence of Tysons redevelopment. Given that it was proposed in 1994, is it fair to say that it has benefits beyond supporting that redevelopment? should not those benefits be included in the Tysons ledger, as well as the project costs? are there other table 7 projects that also have side benefits, that should be included”

note, the point of this is not to challenge the financial bargain that was made. Its to better inform the debate about the general benefit-cost of suburban WUPs.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[AWalkerInTheCity](#) on September 7, 2012 at 11:17 am

and again, in terms of long run build out, its not only transit mode share that matters, but bike/ped share.

as we have discussed the number of new RESIDENTs in Tysons is going to be huge. Its hard to believe that most of them will work elsewhere, and its hard to beleive that most who work and live in Tysons, will walk to work.

Its also likely that the number of transit users will exceed Silver line ridership, even absent new infrastructure. There are already people who commute to Tysons by bus NOW - when parking is free, and walking is terrible. That should increase on all the corridors into Tysons. It will increase more if dedicated transitways (NOT rail lines) are provided in those corridors.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[AWalkerInTheCity](#) on September 7, 2012 at 11:18 am

pardon

“and its hard to beleive that most who work and live in Tysons, will DRIVE to work.”

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

DTSSER on September 7, 2012 at 11:42 am

@Dan Reed

“Yes, I have a master's degree in planning. Not to say that makes me smarter than anybody else, but I'm flattered that you don't think I got my ideas out of thin air.”

I know you have a graduate degree, Dan, so I never thought your ideas were pulled from thin air so much as from the rarefied air of the ivory tower. If you are going to continue writing columns about specific developments that will have real and lasting consequences on the lives of the people actually living at the site of those developments, it would behoove you to first truly learn about the neighborhood in question, or at least converse in depth with the people who live there.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

drumz on September 7, 2012 at 11:49 am

And hear what? “This will affect my property values!” despite overwhelming evidence that new-urbanist style townhomes are a hot item and have continually improved neighborhoods value?

And going to public meetings about specific developments isn't learning what the public thinks?

I wish I knew what it was that made people think that Dan (who grew up in Montgomery county and writes pretty much exclusively about it) knows nothing about their neighborhood which is somehow exceptional to every other neighborhood in the world.

/rant

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

goldfish on September 7, 2012 at 12:07 pm

@Alex B: *Filtering, my man. Filtering.*

[Trickle-down](#) for housing?

This brings up (ahem) a few political concerns.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[Alex B.](#) on September 7, 2012 at 12:16 pm

Trickle-down for housing?

No. Because I'm not proposing that the sole policy lever be increased supply.

This isn't about political slogans, but it is about recognizing that the laws of economics do apply. In the face of this strong demand, increasing the overall supply is a necessary condition.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[goldfish](#) on September 7, 2012 at 12:24 pm

@Alex B: the best way to increase supply of lower cost housing is to build that. To advocate building boffo pricey housing, and then rely on the machinations of the 'complex and multi-faceted' market dynamics to provide lower-cost housing, is perverse.

Considering that, DTSSER has a point that you are not addressing.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[Alex B.](#) on September 7, 2012 at 12:34 pm

the best way to increase supply of lower cost housing is to build that. To advocate building boffo pricey housing, and then rely on the machinations of the 'complex and multi-faceted' market dynamics to provide lower-cost housing, is perverse.

Well, no.

There are two things here - First, there's lowering the cost of market-rate housing by adding supply. That's what I'm talking about here. In an efficient market, we would expect the price of new housing to roughly match the cost of construction, but that's not what we see. The price vastly exceeds the cost, therefore showing us that demand outstrips supply, raising prices in the market. Adding supply would, all else being equal, lower the price of market-rate units.

The reason why the market rate prices are so high here (and in other cities) is largely due to restrictions on adding new supply, such as zoning, NIMBYism, and so on.

The second part is about 'affordable housing,' defined as subsidized housing. In other words, below-market-rate priced housing.

If you add more supply and therefore lower the market-rate base price, then you reduce the need for subsidized, below-market-rate pricing. Middle class folks will be able to afford market rate rents and prices, and therefore they will not need to be subsidized and those subsidies can be more effectively directed to other affordable housing needs.

Considering that, DTSSER has a point that you are not addressing.

No, not really - and that's my point. You need to look at the price of housing in the market, not the price of single new units in any given project.

The reason is simple, as I've tried to explain: housing prices are set in a market, and attempting to isolate individual projects from those market dynamics is a foolhardy exercise.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

goldfish on September 7, 2012 at 12:43 pm

@Alex B: First, you assert that the cost providing is lower-cost housing is greater than the price fetched by providing it, without citation. You need to prove this, as I am not convinced that it is so.

There are lots of examples of lower cost housing being built around the city, just not in the tonier neighborhoods.

Second, if it is so, then we have a market failure, and appealing to market mechanisms to fix something that the market is not doing is an exercise in futility. Then this become an argument to subsidize below market rate housing, not build market rate, high-priced luxury housing.

The argument stands: the best way to provide lower cost housing is to built that, not something else.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

charlie on September 7, 2012 at 12:57 pm

“There are two things here - First, there's lowering the cost of market-rate housing by adding supply. That's what I'm talking about here. In an efficient market, we would expect the price of new housing to roughly match the cost of construction, but that's not what we see. The price vastly exceeds the cost, therefore showing us that demand outstrips supply, raising prices in the mar-

ket. Adding supply would, all else being equal, lower the price of market-rate units.”

Yep, that worked well in the exurbs.

Talking about this without referencing the biggest distortions (mortgages) is pointless.

Housing is expensive because it's the only asset class left middle class people can borrow money to leverage themselves.

REPLY LINK REPORT

Alex B. on September 7, 2012 at 1:02 pm

First, you assert that the cost providing is lower-cost housing is greater than the price fetched by providing it, without citation. You need to prove this, as I am not convinced that it is so.

Haven't we been here before in the comments?

<http://greatergreaterwashington.org/post/15595/breakfast-links-tall-enough/#comment-148681>

See Ed Glaeser:

<http://www.cato.org/pubs/regulation/regv25n3/v25n3-7.pdf>

<http://app.ny.frb.org/research/epr/03v09n2/0306glae.pdf>

http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=658324

See Ryan Avent:

http://www.econtalk.org/archives/2011/10/avent_on_cities.html

Hell, even see Wendell Cox:

<http://www.newgeography.com/content/002636-why-housing-so-expensive-metropolitan-washington>

Cox focuses on the wrong supply restrictions, I'd argue (looking at sprawl, rather than urban and inner suburban restrictions), but the key element there is the restriction on supply.

There are lots of examples of lower cost housing being built around the city, just not in the tonier neighborhoods.

Such as? Built at market rates?

Second, if it is so, then we have a market failure, and appealing to market mechanisms to fix something that the market is not doing is an exercise in futility. Then this become an argument to subsidize below market rate housing, not build market rate, high-priced luxury housing.

The problem here is that you're misattributing the cause of the failure. The status quo is hardly a free market, the point is that it would stand to benefit from a freer use of market mechanisms in order to lower the price of market rate housing.

The argument stands: the best way to provide lower cost housing is to built that, not something else.

As I've said, I disagree. The best way is all of the above - adding supply for market-rate development is a necessary but not sufficient condition, but it is a key element.

We have precious few dollars available for subsidies, and they need to be targeted at the deep affordability for those that truly need it. If we can lower the market rate for housing by adding more market-rate supply, getting down to the price levels seen in, say, Chicago, we'll be much better off as a city/region.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[Alex B.](#) on September 7, 2012 at 1:04 pm

@charlie

Housing is expense because it the only asset class left middle class people can borrow money to leverage themselves.

Sure, finance is a key element. But that doesn't explain the variations across American cities.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[charlie](#) on September 7, 2012 at 1:08 pm

@alexB; no, the difference between cities is how much their middle class residents can pay.

And it is a backwards looking measure.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[goldfish](#) on September 7, 2012 at 1:14 pm

@Alex B: there are lots of lower-cost market rate housing in Wards 7 and 8. Gobs of new construction on Mississippi Ave near [Thearc](#), with more coming. But that never seems to be relevant: sometimes I think I am arguing only with white people that find everything east of the river to be “too dangerous” or something. They certainly do not consider that this very large section is a part of the city.

REPLY LINK REPORT

drumz on September 7, 2012 at 1:46 pm

With regards to housing EOTR, that argument would only work if people weren't moving into those apartments? Are they not?

REPLY LINK REPORT

Alex B. on September 7, 2012 at 1:51 pm

@goldfish

Yes, there's lots of new construction there, but two things: first, it's not a huge increase in the net supply, as those often include a great deal of renovations of existing apartments. Second, those projects aren't often fully market rate - they are often backed by tax-exempt bonds or other housing subsidies.

Examples:

<http://www.dchfa.org/Portals/o/Documents/Investors/HFAAnnualReport-FY2005.pdf>

This isn't to say that these are bad projects - far from it. But it doesn't really provide a counterpoint to the argument that we could use more market-rate supply added to existing neighborhoods.

REPLY LINK REPORT

GiveMeAFreeHousingMarket on September 7, 2012 at 2:01 pm

” But that never seems to be relevant: sometimes I think I am arguing only with white people that find everything east of the river to be “too dangerous” or something. “

I am white (though Im not sure thats important). I've been mugged two times, and my wife has been mugged four times. A grand total of five muggings (we were together for one of them). My wife will NOT move to any place in ward 7 or Ward 8, though we are empty nesters who want to move to the city. So for now we are staying in the suburbs, living a lifestyle we don't care for, using more gas and adding more to congestion than we should, until either our fi-

nances improve or the housing and transit in the pipeline makes things more viable for us - or until wards 7 and 8 are more gentrified.

I will not apologize for not wanting to live somewhere where I am a target for violence. That old dog won't hunt.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

goldfish on September 7, 2012 at 2:01 pm

@Alex B: it one thing to advocate for more market rate housing, but something else to contend that adding high-end market rate housing is the best way to provide for low-end housing.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

[Alex B.](#) on September 7, 2012 at 2:08 pm

it one thing to advocate for more market rate housing, but something else to contend that adding high-end market rate housing is the best way to provide for low-end housing.

Who said it was the best way? My point all along is that adding supply is the key element, given the large demand we see.

Also, define 'low-end' housing: as I've noted, there's a big difference between the low-end of market rate and outright subsidized affordable housing.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

drumz on September 7, 2012 at 2:10 pm

That's not what he's arguing though. The high end housing is expensive too. There is a lot of “duh” in that statement but building higher end stuff doesn't preclude it from becoming middle of the road in the future. Or having low end stuff being renovated upward. However, it can't be anything if it's not built at all. And the people who would have moved in there will find somewhere else to live and that's what will end up pushing someone who can't bid as high somewhere else.

And if people are buying or renting at whatever the market rate then that is the market rate. There isn't some magical “market rate” number that we should strive for absent of the actual conditions. Much like my salary or yours is the market rate for our jobs because that's what our employers decided to pay us. If he paid lower or higher that be a different rate but you'd still get someone to be able to do the job (yet they may be over or under-qualified, and I may be as well)

REPLY LINK REPORT

goldfish on September 7, 2012 at 2:17 pm

@Alex B: [it was pointed out](#) that building \$600k condos does nothing to provide low-end housing; more I think about it, it actually make the low-end situation worse, because such construction takes away land that otherwise could have been used to build places that cost less.

REPLY LINK REPORT

ceefer on September 7, 2012 at 2:39 pm

@Ben Ross”

“The effect of financing is to promote sprawl. Cookie-cutter strip malls, garden apartments, and tract houses on greenfields are much easier to finance than infill.”

--

Maybe that's because of several factors:

1. Land in outer areas is much cheaper, making the housing developed affordable to a wider segment of the market, thereby making them easier for developers to sell and recoup their investment.
2. Most people want to live in areas farther out because of the perception of affordability, homogeny, better schools, lower taxes, safety, lower living costs, more open space, among others.
3. Infill projects incur higher costs, particularly land acquisition and labor.
4. Infill projects are far more likely to incur the costs and delays caused by local opposition and the attendant studies, hearings and lawsuits.

Not saying which approach is better or worse. Just pointing out some facts.

REPLY LINK REPORT

MLD on September 7, 2012 at 2:50 pm

it was pointed out that building \$600k condos does nothing to provide low-end housing;

Yes, you have come full circle - that's where this entire discussion started, with whether or not that assertion is correct. So now you're just begging the question.

it actually make the low-end situation worse, because such construction takes away land that otherwise could have been used to build places that cost less.

Well what is the alternative to letting the developer build on property they bought? Just take it via eminent domain and build govt-subsidized housing? We already provide incentives for developers to build MPDUs - in exchange for earning more profit by building more densely, they have to give some units over for affordable housing. Too bad residents constantly stab this effort in the back by requiring ever more concessions from developers - removing “massing,” taking off a floor, etc.

You're ignoring that the “market rate” in places where demand is extremely high like DTSS has little to do with the cost of actually building the housing and everything to do with what the market will currently bear in terms of selling prices. So who's going to build something that will be priced at a lower amount if people will buy it for a higher amount? What businessperson would do that? So I have to assume your recommendation is that some government entity subsidize housing on a larger scale. Which is a totally separate argument from “building more housing doesn't do anything to lower housing prices.”

REPLY LINK REPORT

[Alex B.](#) on September 7, 2012 at 2:56 pm

it was pointed out that building \$600k condos does nothing to provide low-end housing; more I think about it, it actually make the low-end situation worse, because such construction takes away land that otherwise could have been used to build places that cost less.

And I'll ask again: define low-end. Low end of what? Low end of the market-rate spectrum? Low-end, meaning subsidized? This is not an arbitrary distinction.

How does building these market-rate units hurt the low-end of the market rate spectrum? How do they hurt the subsidized housing market?

The developers are selling them for 600-800k because they think there are buyers willing to spend 600-800k in that market. If they don't build those units, those buyers (who represent the demand) will still be looking for housing in the area. Someone else will take an existing low-rent building, renovate it, and sell units there for 600-800k - and hence, those units 'filter up.'

If you had allowed the new construction, then there wouldn't be as much demand on that old building to be renovated, hence it would remain at a more affordable price point.

That's filtering.

So, *not* building those units won't help preserve the low-end of the market rate. And trying to preserve that land for subsidized housing doesn't work, either - the land owner has rights - you're not going to force them to build and sell for less than the market will bear without some sort of compensation.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

goldfish on September 7, 2012 at 3:04 pm

@MLD: I

have no interest in proscribing what a developer builds. My argument is that so-called “trickle-down” housing economics is a myth.

Besides the points I made above, I add that the 'complex and multi-faceted' market dynamics necessary to turn high-end housing into low-end housing requires neglect and/or disinvestment. This laziness must overcome a property owners natural inclinations to maintain his/her investment. While this does occur, letting a property go to seed is something its owner has an incentive to NOT do. So this whole notion depends on people fighting their better instincts.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

AWalkerInTheCity on September 7, 2012 at 3:10 pm

“Besides the points I made above, I add that the 'complex and multi-faceted' market dynamics necessary to turn high-end housing into low-end housing requires neglect and/or disinvestment.”

again, it depends on what you mean by low end. Theres a normal process of obsolescence. It would be very costly for anyone to keep their property EXACTLY like new - even that it would not be directly competitive with new, as styles change, etc.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

drumz on September 7, 2012 at 3:12 pm

And are you now talking low-end in terms of price or quality? There are plenty of expensive yet crappy living spaces and vice versa.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

AWalkerInTheCity on September 7, 2012 at 3:13 pm

“I have no interest in proscribing what a developer builds. My argument is that so-called “trickle-down” housing economics is a myth. “

That is correct. The idea that filtration theory of housing markets is equivalent to the belief that tax cuts on high income earners always benefit low income people, is, indeed, a myth. Glad to hear you acknowledge that.

That you can make housing affordable by limiting the building of it is also a myth.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

MLD on September 7, 2012 at 3:29 pm

Besides the points I made above, I add that the 'complex and multi-faceted' market dynamics necessary to turn high-end housing into low-end housing requires neglect and/or disinvestment. This laziness must overcome a property owners natural inclinations to maintain his/her investment. While this does occur, letting a property go to seed is something its owner has an incentive to NOT do. So this whole notion depends on people fighting their better instincts.

It doesn't really require disinvestment, only time. Something that is brand new is always going to look and feel nicer than something that has been lived in, even for just a few years. An owner has no incentive to keep things as updated as possible - they have an incentive to make money on their property. For some that incentive may translate into painting and cleaning their apartments between tenants to keep them in order. For others it may mean buying new appliances from time to time. For others it may mean a complete gut and redo of their property.

But you're acting as if the incentive is for people to always have their property in top condition and to always be trying to compete with “brand new.” This is incorrect. The incentive is to make a profit - different individuals and companies will put different amounts of time and money into their properties to make what they consider and appropriate profit. It's not “laziness,” it's a cost-benefit analysis. How much of my/my company's time and money do I want to put into an existing project and how much do I think I can recover from that investment.

The difference between old properties and new in this scheme is that new properties basically only have to worry about price, not condition. Once a new property has been built, there is no reason to try to sell/rent it at anything less than what the market will bear for that kind of property. Why would you leave that profit sitting on the table when it costs you nothing to get more?

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

tmtfairfax on September 7, 2012 at 3:58 pm

“I do not have a personal mode split analysis handy. I have seen you however pick an FTA number that had no back up cited, that was lower than what was in the EIS, and that seemed to have been selected by FTA to make as conservative a case as possible for the Silver Line.”

No, I've been using Fairfax County DOT's estimate for Tysons mode split taken from Table 16 “Table 16. Washington D.C. Metropolitan Area Comparisons for Home-Based Work Daily Trips for Destinations,” a part of “Tysons Corner Transportation and Urban Design Study Regional Impact Analysis – Supplemental Information, Regional Impact Analysis – Supplemental Information.” This report projects a 17% transit share for Tysons, more than for the King Street station in Alexandria, but less than Bethesda, Rosslyn-Ballston or K Street in the District. The Tysons projection is for the then proposed amended Comp Plan, with the other figures being provided by MWCOG. (Since the Supervisors approved c. 30% more density than was studied by FCDOT, additional traffic studies are being done. I expect they might produce a revised mode split for Tysons, but they might not too.

I believe this document is available in the Tysons re-planning section of the Fairfax County website. The Plan's goal is to reach 31% transit usage by 2050. Many, but certainly not all, people who are intimately familiar with the Tysons re-planning process think that target may be overly optimistic. But time will tell.)

A big unknown remains how many train slots per hour will be transferred from the Orange Line. I would think we all could agree the number of trains per hour serving the Tysons stations is important to the number of Tysons workers and residents using rail. But a reduction of Orange Line trains raises other obvious problems. IMO, two other important factors related to Silver Line usage are: 1) the availability of interim parking; and 2) the price, if any, of parking within the station's immediate TOD areas. Many believe interim parking would allow more people to use the Silver Line immediately. Such parking could be reduced over time as more people live and work in Tysons. The availability of free parking at or near the new development will not help reduce SOV trips to and from Tysons.

The source of the 25% figure is the two tax districts (Fairfax and Loudoun) in the Route 28 corridor. The landowners agreed to pay 75% of the costs for widening Route 28 and for replacing intersections with interchanges in exchange for added density and protection against any down-planning. Since the

Tyson's landowners are getting much, much more density, many felt the same formula should be used.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

Tom M on September 7, 2012 at 5:02 pm

Damn, the report is tracking development or population shifts SINCE 2009??? Anyone remember what happened in late 2008 and 2009. Great Recession ring a bell. This was such an abnormal period for the economy overall and financing in particular. It is unlikely to be anything like a “normal” period. Basing any conclusions or future directions on data from around 2008/2009 or even 2010 without looking much further back is simply not very smart.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

DTSSER on September 7, 2012 at 5:14 pm

@drumz

“And hear what? 'This will affect my property values!' despite overwhelming evidence that new-urbanist style townhomes are a hot item and have continually improved neighborhoods value?”

That's a mean-spirited assumption, not to mention erroneous. The videotapes of the Planning Board hearings and the transcripts of the OZAH hearings are available online. You'll be hard-pressed to find anyone complaining about property values.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

AWalkerINThecity on September 7, 2012 at 5:33 pm

“No, I've been using Fairfax County DOT's estimate for Tysons mode split taken from Table 16 “Table 16. “

I was referring to an estimated ridership number for the Silver line(not a mode split number for Tysons) that came from an FTA document and did not agree with what was in the silver line EIS. There are a lot of numbers floating around, and it's hard for me to search for all you have previously said. Perhaps someone could start a website to keep this all straight.

Of course mode share will change over time, and will depend on the cost of parking.

as for interim parking, I believe that attempting to bring more vehicles into the area (beyond those drawn by the new development) is a mistake.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

Drumz on September 7, 2012 at 6:29 pm

Ok, I won't be mean spirited if we can agree that if someone takes time to write articles (for free) about apartment buildings goin up in Montgomery county

That they probably know something about the topic at hand and aren't completely clueless about everything in MoCo.

I dot even know specifically what project you're referring to

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

tmtfairfax on September 8, 2012 at 9:23 am

AWalkerintheCity.

I was talking mode split, and you were for a while too (if you reread your comments). Turning to ridership projections, the Federal Transit Administration did release projected ridership figures that are lower than what was projected by Virginia in the 2004 EIS. Perhaps it was lowered because of the tension between the needs of the Orange Line and those of the Silver Line. The FTA might be assuming only a small number of train slots will be given to the Silver Line. From what I've seen, it's not an unreasonable assumption.

We seem to agree the mode split will be highly dependent on the price of parking. I sense the landowners are backing away from the concept of paid parking, worried about their competitiveness with other areas that don't have paid parking. I don't think they will be successful, but paid parking might grow over time.

Interim parking. You certainly are not alone in opposing interim parking, but both Bulova and Foust are firmly committed to interim parking to address the complaints of neighbors that the Silver Line is unusable from Falls Church, McLean, Vienna and Great Falls. Interim parking will occur.

Bottom line, I see value in Tysons redevelopment as it brings more choice in housing. I don't see sufficient value to nearby communities or even to Fairfax County as a whole to warrant tax increases to fund infrastructure necessary to support redevelopment, although I concede there is value in the added roads, such that some public sector funding is appropriate, so long as it does not require any tax increases. I also remain concerned about the impacts of an increased population in Tysons on surrounding communities to the extent Tysons does not have adequate internal facilities. Also, I fear crushing increases in traffic in surrounding communities caused by growth in Tysons. To the extent growth in Tysons prevents “sprawl,” communities saved from “sprawl” should be paying Fairfax County for the benefits generated. E.g., Western

Loudoun County should compensate Fairfax County for helping keep Western Loudoun rural.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

tmtfairfax on September 8, 2012 at 4:38 pm

“I am hopeful that if the mode share breaks the way we “ideologues” expect, the County will revisit the plan and consider adding additional density.”

Density at the rail stations is already unlimited, subject only to overall density caps within Tysons and I believe a 400 foot building height limit. The overall density limits are needed because the expanded road system fails at 84 million square feet. Once that point is reached, the County has said every new auto trip must be canceled by a new transit or bike/walking trip. I suspect it will be challenging to approve growth beyond 84 million square feet absent a radical change in behavior, the extension of the Orange Line and the addition of another unspecified Metrorail line.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

Mark on September 9, 2012 at 5:15 pm

Scooters and motorbikes are heavily used in the rest of the world. They have much higher: space efficiency, fuel efficiency, and raw materials efficiency than cars. They are only slightly larger than bicycles, similarly vulnerable for operators, and far more practical for hills, cargo, time efficiency (speed), passenger capacity, and greater distances. Our government, however, unfairly applies similar insurance and registration costs to them to discourage use. For similar costs as a car, the car gets chosen. Open your mind and look what works in the rest of the world.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

Mark on September 9, 2012 at 5:31 pm

President Clinton's speech at the Democratic National Convention was a good one. He endorses arithmetic. The area of a circle increases with the square of the distance from the center. More area results in less competition for space and lower prices. Heading out from the center by driving is a linear function for cost, while area goes up squared. Arithmetic and geometry favors sprawl until very high multipliers are applied to transportation costs.

The feudal land usage endorsed by new urbanists are missing the incentive of protection offered by city and castle walls to protect residents from invading Normans or Goths. America doesn't have hundreds of years worth of feudal history supporting density.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

drumz on September 9, 2012 at 5:41 pm

I don't think anyone denies that things are cheaper the further out you are. New urbanism is a set of design/environmental standards that can be applied to greenfield or infill developments.

Also, the presence of cheaper outlying areas doesn't justify high prices in another area.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)

AWalkerInTheCity on September 9, 2012 at 6:48 pm

TMT - I believe, and our discussion has strengthened my belief, that Tysons redevelopment will be a net financial positive for the County - the increase in tax revenues DUE to the development, an increase which will occur around the county, will exceed the costs of the roads (minus the benefits they generate apart from the redevelopment of Tysons, as is the case with the Rte 7 widening, proposed in 1994) I also think that the silver line stations will be perfect usable by people in Mclean, etc, via bus and via bicycle. If they prefer to drive to the metro, there are already existing options on the Orange line.

It seems that there are reasons for people in SOME adjoining communities, especially perhaps Mclean, and especially perhaps Mclean homeowners who prefer a more driving focused lifestyle, to be unhappy. I think that shows that there interests are different from those of the county as a whole. I do not blame them for framing costs and benefits to make the points they wish to - for example by implying that an Orange Line extension is an incremental cost of Tysons, even though most riders would likely be commuters to places other than Tysons, and its been discussed for years before the Tysons project was decided on.

And yes, I think its true that a project like this has external benefits for the region (and indeed, for the planet) I will accept the Fed and state contributions to the Silver Line and other transport projects, and from Loudoun, I will accept their restricted zoning in Western Loudoun, which will keep a larger share of their population within commuting distance of Tysons than otherwise, and thus support Tysons.

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Thayer-D on September 9, 2012 at 8:38 pm

A great Washington Post op-ed from this Sunday's Outlook section puts meet on the bones of Dan's post. These urbanized suburban town centers are a natural evolution of suburbs that continue to densify. If we didn't look to good “old” urbanism for models to grow from, we'd end up with the Corbusian vision of towers in a park connected by super highways, and we know how that turned out. Turn's out that when done right, New Urbanism is just old urbanism with new packaging for the suburbanites working through their phobia's of old cities.

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dcseain on September 9, 2012 at 8:53 pm

That's an insightful take on the suburban town centers, Thayer-D. I've lived in a variety of places here ranging from Woodbridge to downtown Fairfax City, to Capitol Hill, and Reston. The main difference between Reston Town Center and H St NE is the mix of shops. Oh, and the lack of alleys in RTC.

[REPLY](#) [LINK](#) [REPORT](#)



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