

January 29, 2020

Via email

Dear Supervisors, School Board Members and Planning Commissioners,

The Greater Tysons Citizens Association (GTCC) was established in 2008 as a focal point for citizen participation in Fairfax County's planned urbanization of Tysons Corner. It is comprised of concerned citizens, organizations and communities in and around Tysons Corner, including the Vienna Town Council and the McLean Citizens Association. Its goals include, inter alia, promoting, supporting and ensuring that the public infrastructure supports Tysons and the surrounding communities near Tysons, and identifying major policy questions of concern to the surrounding communities that arise in the implementation of the Tysons Comprehensive Plan update.

As we approach the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the major Comprehensive Plan Update for Tysons, the GTCC would like to share some of its key observations and ongoing concerns regarding the transformation of Tysons, including its impact on the surrounding communities. They are outlined in the attachment, along with our suggestions for follow-on consideration.

We would note in this regard, that while the Tysons Comprehensive Plan focused on the development of Tysons, both it and the Board's follow-on actions were sensitive to the impact of that development on surrounding communities. All of the issues listed in our attachment -- mitigating traffic congestion, ensuring adequate athletic fields in Tysons, providing for schools, and ensuring a robust review process before approving significant re-interpretations of Tysons land use rules in the context of individual rezoning requests -- have a clear impact not just within Tysons, but also in the surrounding communities. We hope that you will find our observations and concerns helpful and would welcome the opportunity for further dialogue. We may be reached through our Chair at s-horn@msn.com.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Sally K. Horn

Chair, Greater Tysons Citizens Coalition

CC: Barbara Byron, Fairfax County Department of Planning and Development  
Thomas Biesiadny, Fairfax County Department of Transportation  
Scott Brabrand, Fairfax County Public School Superintendent  
Jeff Platenberg, Fairfax County Public Schools, Facilities and Transportation Services

**GTCC OBSERVATIONS AND CONCERNS REGARDING TYSONS**

January 29, 2020

**CONGESTION CONTINUES TO BE A MAJOR ISSUE.** According to Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) staff, the traffic mitigation efforts and road improvements undertaken in the context of the Tysons Comprehensive Plan were designed to reduce, not eliminate, the expected increase in traffic volumes and associated congestion to and through Tysons. Notwithstanding these ongoing efforts, traffic congestion, including large volumes of cut-through traffic on residential streets, continues to increase in the surrounding communities. Further, the increase in congestion has had a detrimental effect on the quality of life in these communities.

**GTCC REQUEST:** *While we acknowledge and accept that Tysons will continue to grow, we would encourage the Planning Commission (PC) and the Board of Supervisors (BOS) to consider whether and if so, what further short- and long-term steps might be feasible and realistic to address the traffic congestion increase, particularly in the surrounding communities. Involving non-developer stakeholders and associations from the surrounding communities in the consideration of options on an equal footing with developer stakeholders and associations in Tysons would help to ensure that all points of view and concerns are considered.*

**ACTIONS IN 2019 BY THE THEN-PC AND BOS RAISE SERIOUS QUESTIONS ABOUT ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOAL OF TWENTY URBAN ATHLETIC FIELDS WITHIN TYSONS.** The Tysons Comprehensive Plan Update calls for twenty urban athletic fields for Tysons. This is roughly 1/3 the number of fields that would be expected were the suburban standards to apply. Further, for almost ten years, Fairfax County permitted monetary contributions in lieu of actual fields only when the calculated field contribution was 1/3 field or less and, even in these cases, only when these contributions were specifically dedicated to building or improving fields serving Tysons.

However, in late 2019, the PC and BOS endorsed a proposal from one developer to provide a monetary contribution in lieu of providing for 2/3 field. Moreover, in a follow-on motion, the BOS permitted this monetary contribution to be allocated to a non-field use (building a community center on County-owned land).

The fact that Tysons is planned as and expected to be an urban environment does not reduce and may, in fact, increase the need for fields in Tysons to help ensure quality of life and to attract businesses and residents. Providing twenty fields within Tysons' geographical boundaries also would help to reduce competition for space on fields in surrounding communities, as well as the number of pre- and post-rush hour trips into the surrounding communities by Tysons residents and employees; without adequate resources within Tysons, these residents and employees would need to travel outside of Tysons for at least some of their recreational activities.

**GTCC REQUESTS:** *We urge the BOS to revisit the follow-on motion decision referred to above and to reallocate the contributed funds to athletic fields for Tysons. We urge investigating and pursuing other funding sources for construction of the Tysons community center; both bonding and the model used for construction and operation of the McLean Community Center and the Reston Community Center are worth consideration. Further, we urge the PC and BOS to return to the long-accepted practice of requiring in-kind contributions rather than monetary contributions when the calculated field contribution exceeds 1/3 field.*

**TYSONS SCHOOL PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING REQUIRE PRIORITY REVIEW.** According to the Fairfax County Public School (FCPS) staff, some schools that serve the Tysons student population are already above capacity, some substantially, and additional schools also will experience overcrowding before any schools are built in Tysons. The methodologies and formulas for estimating future school populations used in determining capital improvement needs and proffer formulas differ. Further, they do not take into account the likelihood that over time, as residential communities age, communities such as Tysons will become more attractive to families and their school populations will grow beyond initial projections. Compounding the challenges to planning for the school infrastructure needs of the future are school infrastructure funding inadequacies and the relative lack of priority paid to infrastructure needs versus other FCPS needs. Finally, as noted by the Planning Commission's Schools Committee, proffers from developers cover less than 1% of the costs of school construction and none of the land acquisition costs, although

the proposed developments may substantially increase the need for new schools and expansion of existing schools.

**GTCC REQUESTS:** *We applaud the Planning Commission for examining these challenges in its January 8, 2020 report and recommendations to the Board of Supervisors. In 2020-2021, we urge prioritization of the following: (1) completing the revamp of the methodologies and formulas used in capital improvement and proffer formula recommendations to more accurately estimate near- and longer-term school populations in urban areas such as Tysons; (2) increasing staffing and/or other resources in the Facilities Branch of Fairfax FCPS to better enable it to undertake the required planning and infrastructure reviews; and (3) identifying and implementing appropriate new options to acquire land and fund construction of new schools and school capital projects in areas such as Tysons.*

**RECENT INTERPRETATIONS OF KEY LAND USE ELEMENTS OF THE TYSON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN POTENTIALLY ARE ERODING COMMUNITY SUPPORT.**

We recognize that comprehensive plan guidance often is written in general terms to provide some latitude as circumstances change. When, however, the interpretations appear to significantly revise the community's understanding of the original guidance, there is significant potential for eroding community support.

In this regard, the GTCC would like to draw your attention to two 2019 PC/BOS decisions taken in the context of one specific developer application:

- (1) to interpret the 400-foot height limit for buildings to apply only to "occupiable" height; and
- (2) to interpret the allowance for additional height for certain features provided they do "not excessively increase the building height" as permitting an "architectural" feature of 200 feet on top of 400 feet of "occupiable" height.

These decisions elicited considerable consternation among many residents in McLean and the Town of Vienna. We sincerely hope that these were "one-off" decisions, not applicable to any follow-on Tysons rezoning requests absent a

consensus in their favor emerging from a more fulsome and robust review process, as suggested below.

Further, some have raised the question of whether in implementation, Fairfax County is in practice moving beyond the guidance in the Comprehensive Plan and making above-grade structured parking the rule rather than the exception for Tysons buildings. (The guidance states that underground parking is the preferred method for parking in Tysons but that above-grade structured parking, or podium parking, may be appropriate in certain circumstances.)

**GTCC REQUESTS:** *There may be very logical reasons for substantial re-interpretations or changes, such as those identified above. However, the GTCC believes that before substantive interpretations or changes such as these are implemented in the context of any specific developer application, there needs to be a more fulsome and robust process in the County that includes in-depth review of the potential ramifications and that review should include non-developer stakeholders, including from nearby communities. We would encourage both the PC and BOS to provide for that review.*