



February 22, 2011

Planning Commission
c/o Long Range Planning, CPDS
111 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Re: Rockville's Pike: Envision a Great Place
Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan

Dear Planning Commission:

As a stakeholder on Rockville Pike, and the chief advocate for the planning process resulting in the White Flint Sector Plan, the White Flint Partnership is encouraged and excited to see the City's vision for re-shaping the Rockville Pike corridor. Based on the Partnership's experience with the function of Rockville Pike to the south, as well as our coordinating efforts to establish a Vehicular Rapid Transit ("BRT") system along the Pike, we offer the following comments to "Rockville's Pike Envision a Great Place."

The Plan proposed by the City is timely as redevelopment is spreading from Bethesda to White Flint and, up the corridor to the City of Rockville. There are multiple opportunities along the Pike to take advantage of the proximity to the Twinbrook and Rockville Metro stations, as well as better utilizing the single-use retail properties on either side of the Pike. The goals and recommendations of the Plan clearly show Rockville's vision to change the character of the neighborhood from an auto-oriented corridor to one that facilitates various modes of transportation and, therefore, reduce the residents' dependence on single-occupant car trips. In moving the plan forward, we hope the City will continue to keep these principles at the forefront.

The interaction between the Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan and the County's White Flint Sector Plan is a key component of the success of both. And, the roadway is the most critical component linking the two. Because the road runs through both plans, certain elements must be consistent even as the character of the road changes as one travels from one planning area to the next. Specifically, although the number and function of lanes and streetscape may vary, the roadway must be designed so that a BRT system can run through both without extensive or expensive machinations to accommodate it. By virtue of considering this Plan now, the City has the opportunity to effectively plan for future transportation upgrades.

By way of background, the White Flint Partnership (“WFP”) is composed of major property owners in the White Flint area, located almost immediately south of the Rockville Pike planning area: the B. F. Saul Company, Federal Realty Investment Trust, Gables Residential, The JBG Companies, Lerner Enterprises, and The Tower Companies. WFP worked extensively with Montgomery County, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, the State Highway Administration, other property owners and the community to develop a plan to redefine Rockville Pike. In particular, WFP worked with consultants from (at the time) Glattig Jackson, now AECOM, to create a new cross-section for the roadway that would carry pedestrians, transit and cars. And, in doing so, great care was taken to avoid the necessity for significant rights-of-way for both planning and practical considerations: practically, the less right-of-way that needs to be acquired, the more likely it is that the section can be built.

The BRT is one the most critical elements in the White Flint Sector Plan because it provides alternatives to automobile trips and anchors the pedestrian-oriented streetscape. Ultimately, the Montgomery County Council and the Park and Planning Commission endorsed dual concepts in the White Flint Sector Plan; though the alignments are slightly different, both alternatives specifically endorsed the creation of dedicated transit lanes for the BRT; one had the BRT in the median, the other placed the BRT along the curb. The WFP and citizens lobbied extensively, and continues to advocate for, the concept with the BRT in the center of the roadway. The alignment utilizes less right-of-way, creates a safer environment for pedestrians and is simpler to construct and operate.

The WFP is encouraged by the Plan’s vision to rehabilitate the Pike to put the focus on pedestrians, but the absence of a dedicated BRT is the missing piece to this puzzle. In order to reflect Montgomery County’s current planning for BRT, as well as build upon the engineering work which has been completed, Rockville Pike must have a continuous, dedicated, lane for BRT traffic from White Flint through Rockville. As currently proposed, the Plan does not specifically mention BRT as a transit option, nor does it identify a dedicated lane for BRT.

The BRT provides numerous benefits to the City: (1) it removes single-occupant car trips from Rockville Pike and the associated roadway network, thereby reducing congestion, (2) it creates a more pedestrian feel to the roadway and (3) it strengthens the connection to the areas to the south of the City’s jurisdiction. The Plan clearly identifies these three goals in several areas, but does not tie it together in a BRT concept.

The WFP believes the BRT concept is as central to the success of the City’s Rockville Pike corridor as it is to the White Flint Sector. The BRT can be used to jumpstart the redevelopment of the Pike outside the radius of the Metro stations by making access easier to all the properties along the Pike. More importantly, the BRT will serve as the major public open space envisioned by the Plan. And, by locating the BRT right-of-way in the center of the roadway, it reduces the necessity for the extensive takings required by the cross-section proposed by the Plan (assuming the access lanes are abandoned in favor of an approach similar to that used in White Flint): a reduction in the necessary right-of-way will make the redefinition of the Pike much closer to reality.

The WFP, therefore, recommends the following changes to the draft Plan:

1. Add new section in Chapter 5 addressing the benefits of, and need for, a BRT within Rockville Pike.
2. Adopt a new cross-section for Rockville Pike consistent with the version included in the White Flint Sector Plan, with the transit in the center of the road (the road alignment only, streetscape recommendations would be specific to Rockville. (See attached.)

Sincerely,

White Flint Partnership

B.F. Saul
Federal Realty Investment Trust
Gables Residential
The JBG Companies
Lerner Enterprises
The Tower Companies