

Joint Comments from the Fairfax Healthy Communities Network in Support of the West Falls Church Metro Station Rezoning and Final Development Plan

February 7, 2023

COALITION FOR SMARTER GROWTH • FAIRFAX ALLIANCE FOR BETTER BICYCLING • FAIRFAX FAMILIES FOR SAFE STREETS • FAITH ALLIANCE FOR CLIMATE SOLUTIONS • LEWINSVILLE FAITH IN ACTION • NATURE FORWARD • NORTHERN VIRGINIA AFFORDABLE HOUSING ALLIANCE • SIERRA CLUB GREAT FALLS GROUP • WASHINGTON AREA BICYCLIST ASSOCIATION • YIMBY'S OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA

Dear Chairman Murphy and Planning Commissioners:

Please accept these joint comments in support of the West Falls Church Transit Station Area rezoning and final development plan application (RZ/FDP 2022-DR-00006).

The above named organizations, as part of the **Fairfax Healthy Communities Network**, envision a Fairfax County where people can live, work, and play in connected communities that are healthy, sustainable, and inclusive. This vision recognizes that the intersections of equity, housing security, walkable, bikeable neighborhoods, transit-oriented communities, clean air and water, access to green space, and food come together in one word: health.

Providing more homes and jobs in walkable communities at major transit stations like West Falls Church is how we can accommodate future growth, providing more transportation options that will help reduce vehicle miles traveled and slashing our greenhouse gas emissions. This redevelopment will transform acres of underutilized parking lots at the West Falls Church metro station into an inclusive, walkable, bike-friendly, transit-oriented community.

The redevelopment helps realize Fairfax County's vision of providing a network of transit-oriented development (TOD) along its transit corridors. This vision is outlined in the county's Comprehensive Plan guidance,¹ which calls for development close to transit stations to focus on reducing dependence on driving and increasing transit ridership.

¹ Comprehensive Plan:

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/planning-development/sites/planning-development/files/assets/compplan/policy/landuse.pdf>

Transportation

Redevelopment plans include significant transportation improvements that will help enhance access to the West Falls Church metro station and future Route 7 bus rapid transit, providing more transportation options and greater connectivity for people walking and biking. It supports well-designed TOD calling for an enhanced grid of streets, pedestrian and bicycle improvements, wider walkways along primary pedestrian routes, bicycle facilities throughout the development, street trees, and pedestrian scale lighting.

We appreciate the timely implementation of the West Falls Church Active Transportation study following approval of the plan amendment in July 2021. The study, which was completed in November 2022, identified several community-identified pedestrian and bicycling improvements that are needed in the surrounding West Falls Church community. We are glad to learn that the developer has agreed to provide a Haycock Metrorail Connector Trail between the Metro Access Road and Taylor Avenue, as well as improvements to the Haycock and Great Falls intersection. We encourage the county to find funding to continue implementing the additional recommended improvements.

Affordable Housing

Through redevelopment of the station area, approximately 900 new homes will be created, including affordable and workforce dwelling units - 10% of rental units and 15% of for-sale units. Providing affordable housing near transit and jobs is essential to ensuring an inclusive and economically prosperous Fairfax County where people are able to live near their work, helping to reduce long commutes through the county, and reducing our climate impacts. All of the proposed additional homes near metro transit will be critical to meeting the county's goals of right-sizing housing needs.

Environment

We are grateful the proposed plan includes open space, linear parks, and the preservation of native trees and the forested area along Metro Access Road as part of the redevelopment. Building designs will include a minimum of LEED-silver certification and incorporation of bird-friendly design elements.

Additionally, redevelopment plans will provide enhanced stormwater management, including green infrastructure. Specifically, the fully redeveloped property is expected to provide 40% reduction in peak run-off over current conditions. The applicant has also committed to planting native plant and tree species and adhering to landscape plans that will be verified by the county's urban forest program.

In Summary

Redevelopment of the West Falls Church station area will complement and connect to the City of Falls Church's new mixed-use redevelopment already underway and future redevelopment of the Virginia Tech property. Together these projects will create a new inclusive, vibrant, and livable neighborhood with great access to transit in West Falls Church.

We ask that you vote in favor of the rezoning application.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Coalition for Smarter Growth, Sonya Breehey, Northern Virginia Advocacy Manager

Fairfax Alliance for Better Bicycling, Yvette White, Board Member

Fairfax Families for Safe Streets, Mike Doyle, Founder

Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, Andrea McGimsey, Executive Director

Lewinsville Faith in Action, John A. Calhoun

Nature Forward, Renee Grebe, Northern Virginia Conservation Advocate

Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance, Jill Norcross, Executive Director

Sierra Club Great Falls Group, Susan Bonney, Chair

Washington Area Bicyclist Association, Kevin O'Brien, Virginia Organizer

YIMBYs of Northern Virginia, Aaron Wilkowitz, Fairfax Lead