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Loudoun County (Virginia) contemplates balancing housing growth and job growth in Metrorail areas

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EHI has continued providing input on Loudoun County Virginia’s planning for housing and other development related to the anticipated arrival in 2020 of two Metrorail (commuter rail) stations. Those stations (on the “Silver Line”), will extend the region-wide Metrorail system to several miles West of Dulles International Airport (a federal facility which will have its own Metrorail station). A map of the current and future Silver Line stations appears below (p. 2).

As we have reported, Loudoun’s planning decisions will have an important impact on its residents’ housing costs and on housing supply in the Washington, DC, region. For example, Loudoun is expected to have the fastest economic growth of any county in the Washington, DC, region between now and 2032, with job growth creating a demand for up to 63,000 new housing units.

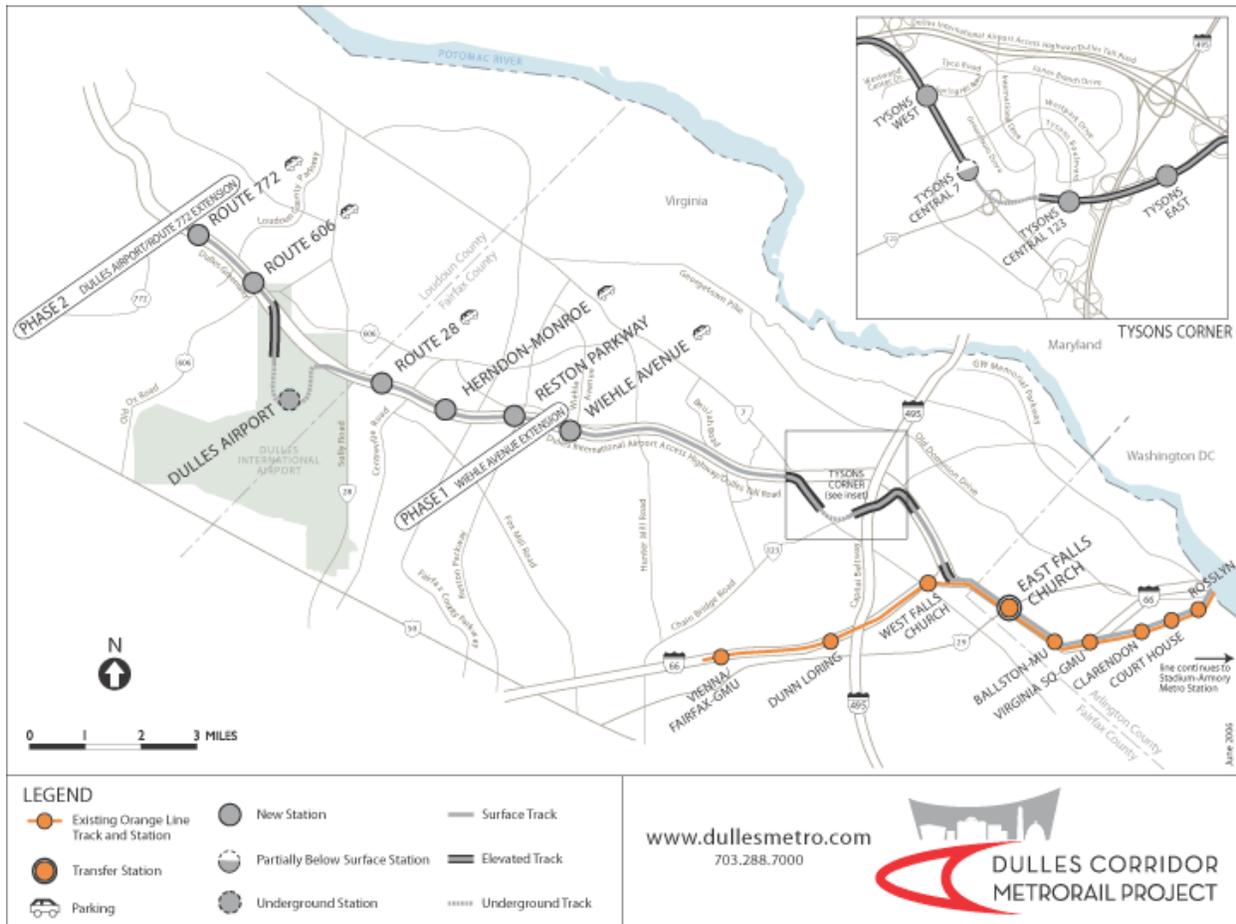
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BREAKING NEWS! Loudoun County’s Dept. of Planning and Zoning’s (DPZ) presented its draft land use plan for the Metrorail areas (“Silver Line Small Area Plan”) at a public workshop on June 29. DPZ revealed a very different approach than the one submitted by planning consultants in December to the County’s previous Board of Supervisors. (The newly-elected Board, which took office January 1, includes five new members among the nine Supervisors.)

DPZ contemplates permitting enough housing units to balance the total number of jobs in those areas. The previous consultants’ recommendations had been for overwhelmingly non-residential development. DPZ’s approach is consistent with the public’s input on the Metrorail planning, with good planning principles, and with the facts on the ground—as documented in EHI’s report mentioned above, which EHI submitted to DPZ in November 2015. (“EHI Report,” posted at:

<http://www.equitablehousing.org/images/PDFs/LoudounMetrorailRelatedHousingNeeds-hyperlinked.pdf>).

DPZ's draft plan envisions a total of 22,419 housing units and 28,272 jobs in those areas by 2040.¹ Thus, DPZ's draft plan would include one housing unit for every 1.26 jobs. The generally recommended target ratio of jobs to housing units in a community, according to a recent American Planning Association (APA) advisory, is 1.5 jobs per housing unit.² On average, there are about 1.5 workers per housing unit in a typical community.



Loudoun County, VA, is planning for development near two Silver Line Metrorail stations—the Dulles Gateway (“Route 606”) and Ashburn (“Route 772”) Stations

¹ (Loudoun County Dept. of Planning and Zoning, *Silver Line Small Area Plan, Public Workshop Presentation*, pp. 43-44 (posted at: <https://www.loudoun.gov/DocumentCenter/View/122283>).

² APA Advisory Service Report 516, *Jobs-Housing Balance*, p. 4 (2003), available through: https://www.planning.org/store/product/?ProductCode=BOOK_P516.

So, the draft plan includes enough housing to balance the workforce in the Metrorail areas and reduce the major deficit of housing in Eastern Loudoun overall. Below, we discuss the following developments:

- Planning consultants submit recommendations (December 2015)
- EHI submits report to newly-elected Board of Supervisors (January 2016)
- Newly-elected Board takes initial steps on Metrorail-area planning
- EHI attends meetings of Loudoun’s Housing Advisory Board
- Loudoun’s Nighttime Economy Advisory Committee considers EHI’s input and issues favorable recommendations
- DPZ Draft Small Area Plan—jobs and housing specifics

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PLANNING CONSULTANTS ISSUE RECOMMENDATIONS

On Dec. 18, 2015, the Scenario Planning Study (SPS) consultants hired by the previous Board issued their final report and recommendations for housing and other development in the small Scenario Planning Study Area (SPSA) close to Loudoun’s two future Metrorail stations.³ The SPSA is outlined in red on the map below (p. 4). (Our last Update (December 2015) discusses earlier proceedings in that study, EHI’s participation in the public sessions, and its November 2015 report.)

The previous Board’s stated goals for Metrorail-area planning focused on generating new tax revenue and employment growth for the County and didn’t mention housing—which is in extremely short supply in that area.⁴ Predictably, the consultants ultimately recommended

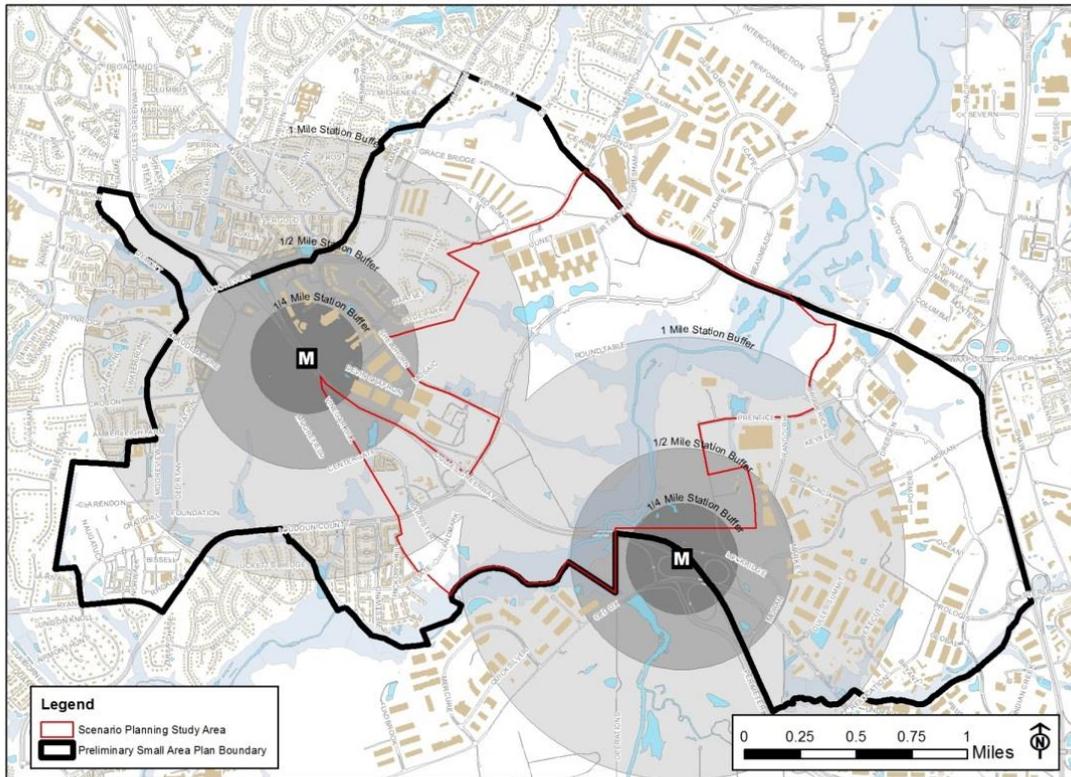
³ Stantec Planning Group, *Consultant Recommended Development Scenario, Summary Workbook* (Dec. 18, 2015) (“CRD Scenario”).

⁴ *E.g.*, DPZ Presentation to Loudoun County Board of Supervisors, *Silver Line Comprehensive Plan Amendment Update*, Jan. 21, 2016 (“DPZ 01/21/2016”), p. 1:

The purpose of the CPAM [Comprehensive Plan Amendment] is to evaluate the existing planned land uses around the future Metrorail stations and to ensure achievement of the desired balance between 1) *Prompt realization of tax revenues* to support future Metrorail operations, 2) *Maximizing future employment generation*, 3) Achieving the desired land use pattern, and 4) *Minimizing demands on the County’s transportation infrastructure*.

(Emphasis added) There were 35,594 jobs and 220 housing units in the overall Metrorail Service District in 2010—an astronomical jobs-housing ratio of 162 jobs per housing unit! *See, e.g.*, EHI Report, p. 6 (citing Loudoun County Dept. of Planning, *ULI Washington Technical Assistance Panel Briefing Book* (“TAP Briefing Book”), pp. 31, 33).

overwhelmingly commercial growth (mostly office) and relatively few new housing units. Their final recommendations, finalized after conferring privately with members of the previous Board, contrasted sharply with the consultants' own previous scenarios and with the input they received in the public sessions. Those recommendations also seem quite inconsistent with the current realities on the ground.



SILVER LINE AREA
Comprehensive Plan Amendment

Preliminary Study Area Boundary

For example, the consultants' recommended scenario envisioned a total of 58,840 workers at full buildout (beyond 2040)—about 80% of them office workers.⁵ Such a high goal for office jobs

⁵ *CRD Scenario*, p. 40 (“new employees” and “percent distribution of new employees by land use category”). By 2040, 82% of the workers were envisioned to be office workers (38% compact office and 44% suburban office). At full buildout, 79% of all workers were envisioned to be office workers (53% compact office + 26% suburban office). *Id.*

The consultants (Stantec Consulting Group) apparently based their job growth predictions on different assumptions from the County's stated guidelines. The consultants previously had given the square-footage they envisioned in different commercial categories under four alternative scenarios, both for the year 2040 and at full buildout. (*E.g.*, Stantec Consulting Group, *Loudoun County Land Use Scenario*

may be questioned in light of the area-wide and nationwide glut of office construction. The vacancy rate for offices at the Ashburn Station is an astronomical 46.6%.⁶ “New station areas along the Silver Line have high office vacancy rates above 19%.”⁷

The consultants’ recommended housing development scenario was problematic too. They envisioned no more than 7,734 housing units by 2040 (jobs-housing ratio of 2.72:1). That is only about six hundred more units than would be permitted under the current zoning, which did not contemplate Metrorail stations in that area. At full buildout, there would be only 9,705 housing units under that scenario, creating a highly unbalanced jobs-housing ratio of more than 6.06 jobs per housing unit.

The consultants’ housing recommendation way quite contrary to the scenario that had been developed based on public input—the Community Workshop Scenario (CW), created as a result of the August 26, 2015, public planning workshop. The CW called for 22,441 units at full buildout—*231% more housing* than the consultants ultimately recommended! The CW would have produced a much healthier jobs-housing ratio.

The situation on the ground clearly calls for a great deal more housing in relation to job growth in the Metrorail areas. In the SPSA, there currently are an estimated 6,114 jobs and only 124 housing units (a jobs-housing ratio of more than 49:1)! Many thousands of workers (such as business owners and employees, professionals, service and retail employees) already crowd the roads, commuting to jobs in the SPSA.

Having more than 58,000 jobs in that area and less than 10,000 housing units would multiply the already enormous commuting problems in the SPSA. Further, the rest of the area near those stations (the “Metrorail Service District” (see map below, p. 6)), also is overwhelmingly commercial. It contained a total of more than 35,000 jobs and only 220 total housing units in 2015—an astronomical jobs-housing ratio of 162 jobs per housing unit)!

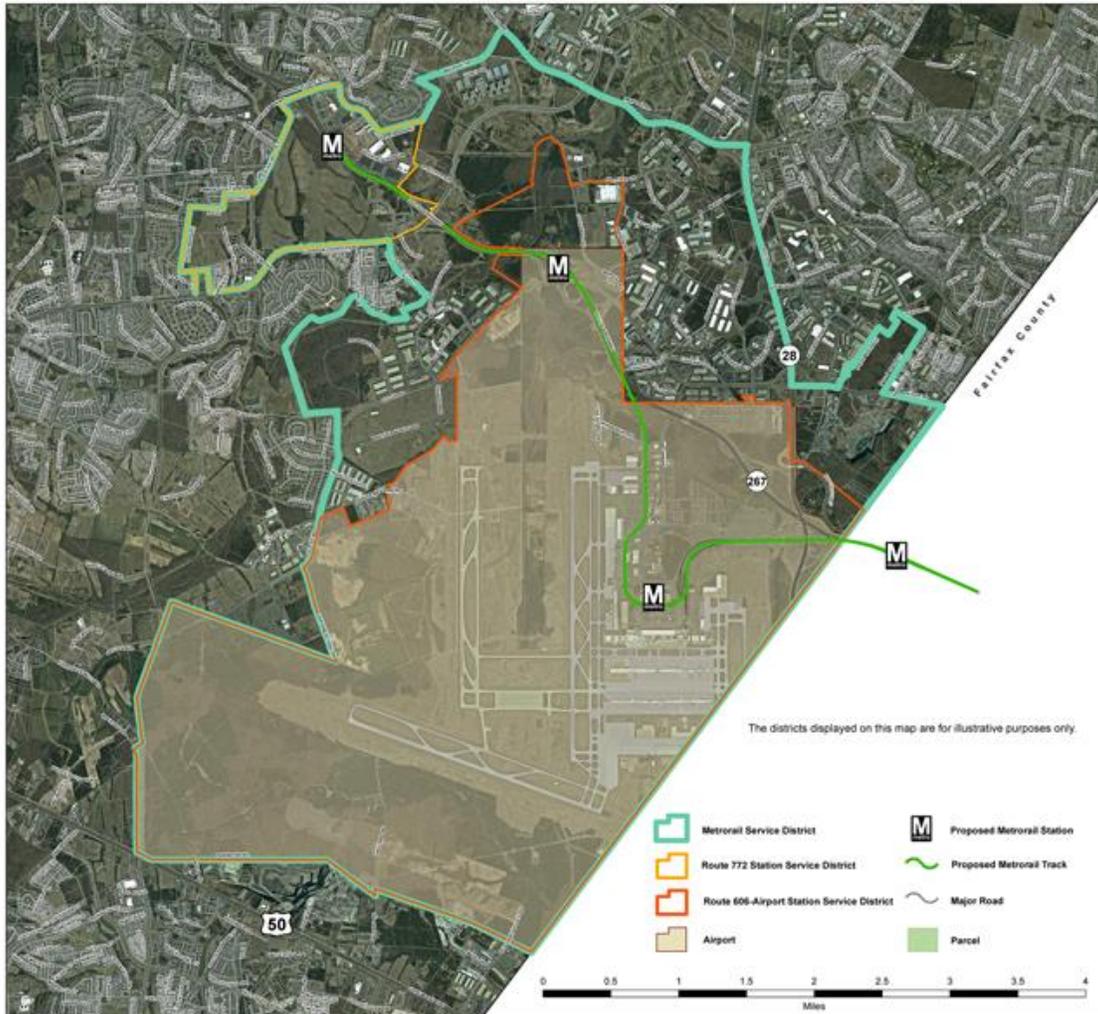
A low jobs-housing ratio in the SPSA is crucial to avoid problems such as much longer commuting times on much more congested highways for workers; additional road building and road maintenance burdens; aggravated urban sprawl; artificially high and unstable housing prices; increased poverty and homelessness; and lost economic development. The consultants’ recommendations actually would have increased all those problems.

Planning Study, Board of Supervisors Presentation, Sept. 16, 2015 (“Stantec 09/16/2015”), pp. 20, 27, 34 and 41 of 50). The current, published Loudoun government estimates of square footage per worker in each commercial category are found in the Loudoun County 2015 Fiscal Impact Committee Guidelines, p. 16 (“Long-Run Gross Square Feet per Employee” for each Nonresidential Component).

⁶ *Market Analysis and Best Practices Study Report (2015) (“HR&A Team Study”), p. 4-18.*

⁷ *HR&A Team Study, p. 2-33.*

Metrorail Service District
Route 772 and Route 606-Airport Station Service Districts



Loudoun County Office of Mapping and Geographic Information

Date Mapped 04.30.2013
 Map Number 2013-045

EHI SUBMITS REPORT TO NEWLY-ELECTED BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

On January 5, 2016, EHI submitted to each member of the County's newly-elected Board of Supervisors (by e-mail) its in-depth report on Loudoun County housing needs.⁸ EHI documented

⁸ EHI, *Loudoun County's Metrorail-Related Housing Needs*, Nov. 4, 2015 ("EHI Report"), (posted at: <http://www.equitablehousing.org/images/PDFs/LoudounMetrorailRelatedHousingNeeds-hyperlinked.pdf>).

matters such as the severe shortfall of housing in areas near the future Metrorail stations; Loudoun’s high housing costs; and expert studies documenting the benefits of permitting ample, multi-family housing close to the stations.

EHI immediately got specific, encouraging responses to its report from two new Board members—one Republican and one Democrat. The newly-elected Board will make the final planning and zoning decisions for the County.⁹

NEWLY-ELECTED BOARD TAKES INITIAL STEPS ON METRORAIL-AREA PLANNING

On Jan. 21, 2016, DPZ presented the consultants’ report to the Board and recommended that it forward the report to the Board’s Transportation and Land Use Committee (TLUC (pron. “Tee-luck”)) for further discussion.¹⁰ The Board approved that recommendation.

At the ensuing TLUC meeting on Feb. 12, DPZ Director Ricky Barker stated that there were a few concerns about the consultants’ recommendations, and that his planning staff would make their own recommendations regarding land uses. DPZ proposed a preliminary boundary for a Small Area Plan (SAP) (outlined in black on map, p. 4). That boundary appears to approximately double the area involved in the Scenario Planning Study Area.

DPZ also submitted a work plan composed of various planning steps that would lead to Board adoption of a Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPAM) in November 2016. TLUC voted to send DPZ’s proposed Small Area Plan boundary and work schedule to the Board, which approved them at its meeting on March 17.

EHI ATTENDS MEETINGS OF LOUDOUN’S HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

EHI’s President, Tom Loftus, also has attended several monthly meetings of the County’s Housing Advisory Board (HAB) this year. HAB’s mandate includes serving as a “source of study and advocacy for the Board of Supervisors on the supply and demand issues of affordable housing.”

Mr. Loftus introduced himself and EHI at HAB’s January meeting, and he was invited to send EHI’s report on the County’s housing needs to that Committee. He did so (in PDF form), and

⁹ Unlike the previous Board, which was all-Republican, the newly-elected Board includes three Democrats, including the first African-American Chair of a Board of Supervisors in Virginia history (Phyllis Randle). The other two new Board members are Republicans.

¹⁰ DPZ Presentation to Loudoun County Board of Supervisors, *Silver Line Comprehensive Plan Amendment Update*, Jan. 21, 2016, p. 1.

that report was forwarded to each member of HAB. Mr. Loftus received favorable comment on the report at the February HAB meeting.

LOUDOUN'S NIGHTTIME ECONOMY ADVISORY COMMITTEE CONSIDERS EHI'S INPUT AND ISSUES FAVORABLE RECOMMENDATIONS

Loudoun County's Economic Development Advisory Commission created the Nighttime Economy Ad-hoc Committee (NEAC) in 2015, to look at ways of stimulating after-hours vitality in urbanized areas of the county—including near its future Metrorail stations. NEAC, composed of dozens of knowledgeable Loudoun residents and business people, researched a wide range of issues such as land development regulations, transportation, housing and public safety.

NEAC has come through with solid recommendations regarding housing, and it clearly considered EHI's input. In EHI's first comments on NEAC's draft recommendations, on Feb. 19, EHI congratulated NEAC for the sensitivity it already was showing to housing issues. EHI summarized key considerations that make abundant housing in the County's urbanized areas a critical factor in the improvement of Loudoun's nighttime economy. (A copy of those comments is posted at: [http://www.equitablehousing.org/images/PDFs/EHI-NEAC Comments_email_2-19-16.pdf](http://www.equitablehousing.org/images/PDFs/EHI-NEAC%20Comments_email_2-19-16.pdf).)

EHI President Tom Loftus attended NEAC's public input session on March 14. He had extensive discussions during the housing breakout session. The new Chair of Loudoun County's Board of Supervisors Phyllis Randle, was present—as were NEAC Co-Chair Todd Pearson, the NEAC housing subcommittee co-chairs, and many interested residents.

Also, Patricia Nicoson, who had been Chair of the Reston Task Force for planning new development around Reston's three Metrorail stations, spoke during that housing breakout session. Mr. Loftus emphasized that under Ms. Nicoson's leadership, the Reston Task Force recommended balancing the number of expected new jobs (more than 30,000) with new housing units for an equivalent number of workers (more than 22,000 multi-family units). The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors adopted that recommendation as part of its Comprehensive Plan Amendment for the Reston Metrorail areas, in February 2014.

On March 25, 2016, EHI submitted follow-up comments to NEAC focused on questions raised at the March 14 meeting about what geographic areas are appropriate for pursuing jobs-housing balance. EHI explained why the distinctive, local needs of Loudoun's Metrorail corridor deserve their own jobs-housing analysis.

EHI urged NEAC to consider that transit-oriented developments (TOD's) "that are fairly well balanced between residential and nonresidential development, or even predominantly residential, have been quite successful—in Northern Virginia and across the United States." (TOD's generally are areas within about one-half mile of transit stations.) Finally, EHI explained how the term "balance" is used in different land use contexts which should not be confused

with jobs-housing balance. (A copy of those comments is posted at: http://www.equitablehousing.org/images/PDFs/EHI-NEAC_follow-up_comments_3-25-16.pdf.)

NEAC took EHI's input to heart. Both sets of EHI's comments, along with its extensive report on Loudoun County's housing needs and its follow-up memo on jobs-housing balance, were included in the meeting packet for NEAC's Sub-Committee Chair Meeting on April 6, 2016. (<https://www.loudoun.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/5368> (pp. 9-40)).

In NEAC's final report, its Co-Chairs noted that because "many residents of ALL ages and incomes prefer to live, work and play in walkable environments with rich recreational and entertainment amenities, Loudoun needs growth policies, in a number of areas, which reflect that reality." NEAC's specific housing recommendations are all supportive of EHI's positions. They are:

- *Defining Housing Diversity* – In order to insure the future success of the County as both an urban and suburban economy, Housing Diversity should be defined in the broadest sense to include a variety of types, densities, heights, and *price structures*. Housing diversity should include special emphasis on millennials and empty-nesters which will drive a significant portion of the commercial and retail tax base, as well as "*affordable housing for all sectors of the population*."
- *Prioritization of Housing- Adopt housing diversity and affordability as a top priority of the Board of Supervisors* in the County's strategic planning, operations and economic development.
- *Comprehensive Plan rewrite-* Undertake a full review and rewrite of the Comprehensive Plan that *recognizes housing as the linchpin to commercial economic development success. Planning and zoning ordinances will account for significant density and diversity in specific areas including, but not limited to, Loudoun's two metro stations and key economic sectors.*
- *Policies and Strategies Supporting Live/Work/Play-* Embrace the concept of "Live Work and Play" into all practices by establishing planning and zoning policies and comprehensive plan strategies that support a vibrant – and viable – *balance of retail, office and housing with multiple density, height and pricing options.*
- *Future Research-* Research and address appropriate business practices, policies and staffing models that support the success of developing and maintaining housing diversity.
- *Transportation Options-* The County will foster, either directly or through public private partnerships, *multi-modal transportation options that connect retail areas and housing of all types: urban, suburban, and rural.*
- *Development Proffers-* In 2016 legislation was passed by the Commonwealth to restrict the use of development proffers. Development proffers have been a critical tool used in establishing neighborhoods in Loudoun County. *Loudoun must find effective ways to work with developers to ensure a diverse housing portfolio without the use of proffers.*

(Some emphasis added) We hope Loudoun's Board will give due consideration to NEAC's report.

DPZ DRAFT SMALL AREA PLAN—JOBS AND HOUSING SPECIFICS

Of the 22,419 total housing units forecast for 2040 in DPZ's draft plan of June 29, 2016, there would be 10,707 new multi-family units (condominiums and apartments—mostly in mid-rise and high-rise buildings within a half-mile of Metrorail stations). There also would be 4,570 new "single-family attached" units (apparently all townhomes). Those units would be in addition to the 7,142 housing units already permitted by the current zoning within the Small Area Plan boundaries.

Of the 28,272 total jobs forecast for 2040 in DPZ's draft plan, there would be 9,512 new workers, in addition to the 18,760 workers who could be accommodated by the non-residential development already permitted within the Small Area Plan boundaries.

All in all, DPZ's draft plan is a great advance over the previous consultants' recommendations, enabling much less traffic congestion and urban sprawl, and much more housing opportunity. We hope the Board approves a plan that is consistent with DPZ's approach.