

# The Politics of Redevelopment Planning in Tysons and Outcomes 10 Years Later

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Emily Hamilton

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## **Abstract**

Following the allocation of funds for a new line on the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's Metrorail system, the Board of Supervisors in Fairfax County, Virginia, undertook redevelopment planning for its Tysons area. The redevelopment plan was the first of its kind. The board adopted a comprehensive plan that established the objective of transforming Tysons from highway-oriented suburban office park development into a walkable, mixed-use area. The redevelopment effort has received extensive attention for its goal to turn a highly car-oriented area into walkable, transit-oriented development. But what is perhaps more notable about the Tysons redevelopment planning effort is its objective to allow extensive multifamily housing construction in a wealthy suburban community. So far, more progress has been made toward the goal of housing construction than walkability.

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# The Politics of Redevelopment Planning in Tysons and Outcomes 10 Years Later

Emily Hamilton

## 1. Introduction

Tysons, Virginia, an unincorporated area in Fairfax County, is surrounded and bisected by major highways—the Capital Beltway (Interstate 495); State Route 123; the Dulles Airport toll road; and State Route 7. Tysons is the prototypical edge city, a suburban job center dominated by automobile infrastructure designed to get commuters and their cars from their homes to offices and shopping malls in Tysons as quickly and easily as possible.<sup>1</sup>

Because of its location at the intersection of major highways and arterial roads and its role as a center of office and retail destinations, Tysons is well known for traffic congestion and for being hostile to anyone traveling outside a car. But in 2004, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), in collaboration with state and local policymakers, finalized plans for the first phase of a new Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) Metrorail (Metro) line that would include five new stations, four in Tysons. In 2010, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors finalized a new Comprehensive Plan and zoning ordinance for Tysons in anticipation of the new Silver Line. The plan's objective was to increase residential development in Tysons and create mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods around each new station.<sup>2</sup> Appointing a task force for the Tysons redevelopment plan comprising members with diverse interests was a

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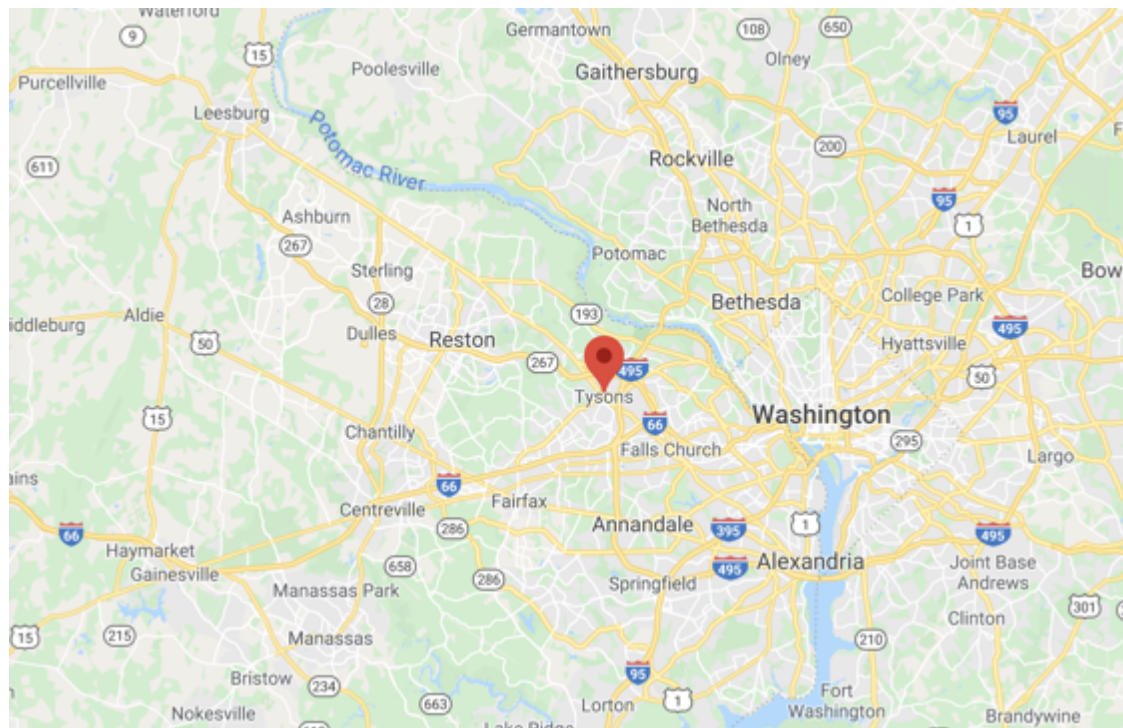
<sup>1</sup> For a study on edge city development, see the book where the term was coined, Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York: Doubleday, 1991). In *A Field Guide to Sprawl*, Dolores Hayden and Jim Wark criticize the term “edge city,” arguing that edge node is a more appropriate term since such cities are dotted around preexisting metropolitan areas. See Hayden and Wark, *A Field Guide to Sprawl* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> In 2010, my study on the Tysons redevelopment planning process was published. This paper builds on that earlier work and details the political economy of redevelopment since the passage of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan. See Emily Washington (now Hamilton), “Stifling the Market Process with Land-Use Regulation: An Analysis of Modern Trends in Land-Use Regulation Applied to Redevelopment in Tysons Corner, Virginia” (Mercatus Center Graduate Policy Essay No. 06, Mercatus Center at George Mason University, Arlington, VA, Summer 2010).

politically feasible mechanism for permitting multifamily construction, a rarity in high-income, coastal-city suburban jurisdictions. However, little progress has been made toward the Comprehensive Plan’s walkability goals to date.

When the Washington region’s Metro system was originally planned in 1968, the designers envisioned a rail line to Dulles Airport in Loudoun County, Virginia, 26 miles west of downtown Washington, DC. The West Falls Church station in Fairfax County was originally built to accommodate a new line going northwest to the airport through Tysons.<sup>3</sup> Figure 1 shows Tysons’s location in the Washington region.

**Figure 1. Tysons in the Washington Region**



Source: Google, “Map Data: Google,” 2020, accessed April 28, 2020.

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<sup>3</sup> Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, “Dulles Metrorail History,” 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060513064531/http://www.dullesmetro.com/about/history.cfm>.

However, earnest planning for the Silver Line did not begin until 2000, when federal and local agencies began completing required analyses of alternatives, comparing various rail options to a no-build alternative and to a rapid-transit bus line.<sup>4</sup> In 2004, the FTA completed its final environmental impact statement in favor of building the Silver Line to Dulles in two phases, with the first phase ending at the Wiehle-Reston station, one station west of the Tysons area.<sup>5</sup>

The Comprehensive Plan and resulting zoning amendments for Tysons include provisions both to allow denser development generally and to encourage an increase in residential construction relative to office construction. Within one-eighth of a mile of Metro stations, where the densest development is permitted, these rules include the following:

- A 400-foot height limit.
- A floor area ratio (FAR) of 2.5 for office development, plus potential bonus density.<sup>6</sup>
- Unlimited FAR for development other than offices (designed to encourage nonoffice development).
- No parking minima for office or hotel development and one parking spot required per unit in multifamily buildings.<sup>7</sup>

Moving past one-eighth of a mile away from Metro stations, the allowable density decreases and the required parking increases. The zoning ordinance gives policymakers the freedom to allow for increased density and height for projects that advance the plan's

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<sup>4</sup> Federal Transit Administration, "Alternatives Considered," chap. 2 in *Final Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(F) Evaluation*, December 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Federal Transit Administration, "Executive Summary," in *Final Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(F) Evaluation*, December 2004.

<sup>6</sup> FAR is a restriction on building density that limits the amount of floor area that a building can include relative to its lot size. For example, a parcel zoned for a FAR of 2.0 could include a two-story building that covers its entire lot or a four-story building that covers half of its lot.

<sup>7</sup> Fairfax County, "Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance," Article 6, Part 5, PTC Planned Tysons Corner Urban District, December 19, 2019, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/zoning/art06.pdf>.

objectives.<sup>8</sup> Transforming Tysons to a mixed-use, high-density area is in line with a vision for urban development known as Smart Growth. Smart Growth emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to traditional land use regulations.<sup>9</sup> Whereas traditional zoning rules limit density and support car-oriented development, Smart Growth adherents advocate for walkable, bikeable, transit-oriented development.

Today, wide streets carry fast-moving cars through the Tysons area, and it has few relatively narrow streets that comfortably accommodate people on foot or bike. Large setbacks and seas of surface parking lots on yet-to-be-redeveloped lots increase the distance nondrivers must walk or bike to reach their destinations. The redevelopment plan relies on the unusual, possibly unprecedented, step of building a new grid of narrow, pedestrian-friendly streets as part of the redevelopment of its suburban office parks, car dealerships, and big-box shopping centers.<sup>10</sup> In spite of the increasing adoption of Smart Growth theory among city planners, actually rezoning built-out areas to permit denser, more walkable redevelopment has been relatively rare since the advent of zoning in the early 20th century.<sup>11</sup>

Politically, homeowners are generally the greatest obstacle to allowing denser redevelopment in built-out urban areas. Economist William Fischel calls homeowners

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<sup>8</sup> Fairfax County, “Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance,” 51.

<sup>9</sup> Sanford Ikeda and Emily Washington (now Hamilton), “How Land-Use Regulation Undermines Affordable Housing” (Mercatus Research, Mercatus Center at George Mason University, Arlington, VA, November 2015), 15–18.

<sup>10</sup> The current Comprehensive Plan for Tysons emphasizes the creation of a grid of narrow streets as one of the most important redevelopment priorities. Fairfax County, “Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan 2017 Edition,” accessed April 17, 2020, [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/comprehensive\\_plan\\_fc\\_comp\\_plan2017ed\\_tysons\\_amended04\\_04\\_2017.pdf](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/comprehensive_plan_fc_comp_plan2017ed_tysons_amended04_04_2017.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Until recently, Houston, Texas, the US city with the most liberal land use regulations, was perhaps the only city where replacing existing single-family houses with denser development was feasible. In 2019, Minneapolis policymakers reformed their city’s zoning ordinance to permit triplexes on lots that were previously zoned exclusively for single-family development. Also in 2019, Oregon policymakers adopted a state law that requires many localities across the state to permit duplexes and in some cases fourplexes on lots zoned for single-family exclusively. Allowing denser development in areas zoned for commercial use, as in the Tysons case, has been somewhat more common. Section 2 of this paper covers some examples of where commercial redevelopment has been permitted in the Washington, DC, region.

“homevoters” in his political analysis of zoning because of their outsized influence on local politics and land use policy.<sup>12</sup> Local policymakers use zoning and other land use restrictions to limit housing construction in their jurisdictions. While Smart Growth policies to permit infill densification have not been widely adopted, in no small part because of homevoter opposition to infill development, Smart Growth policies designed to limit “sprawl” outside of developed areas have been popular with municipal and state governments. Greenbelts, growth boundaries, and growth caps can be found in many states and localities across the country.<sup>13</sup>

By allowing new multifamily development in Tysons, Fairfax policymakers have bucked national trends.<sup>14</sup> In many parts of the country, particularly in wealthy suburbs like Fairfax County, local land use regulations stand in the way of new housing construction, if not banning it entirely.<sup>15</sup> Homeowners in other parts of Fairfax County did present some opposition to allowing increased development in Tysons. However, support for redevelopment from commercial landowners who stood to benefit from increased rights to develop their land and increased property values, along with local activists who supported a Smart Growth vision for Tysons for

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<sup>12</sup> William A. Fischel, *The Homevoter Hypothesis: How Home Values Influence Local Government Taxation, School Finance, and Land-Use Policies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> The Portland, Oregon, region has the country’s most well-known and binding urban growth boundary that was established by state policymakers in 1973. For decades, prices in the Portland region rose in line with national trends as the growth boundary was expanded gradually over time and localities permitted growth within the boundary. However, since 2000, Portland house prices have more than doubled after accounting for inflation. Today, the median house in the Portland region is worth \$462,000, compared with \$247,000 nationally. Zillow Research, ZHVI Single-Family Homes Time Series (\$) (dataset), accessed March 28, 2020, <https://www.zillow.com/research/data/>. Other notable growth boundaries in the United States include local growth boundaries in Lexington, Kentucky, and state growth management laws in Florida and Hawaii.

<sup>14</sup> Salim Furth et al., “HUD Can Use Housing Market Data to Inform Fair Housing Accountability” (Public Interest Comment, Mercatus Center at George Mason University, Arlington, VA, March 12, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> Kevin Erdmann describes expensive regions that have strong labor markets, expensive housing, and low rates of housing permitting as “closed access cities” because they use land use regulations to block new housing construction. He points out that even cities such as Detroit and St. Louis, which are losing population because of economic distress, are permitting housing at a higher rate than wealthy regions many people would like to move to, including Boston, Los Angeles, New York City, and San Francisco. Kevin Erdmann, *Shut Out: How a Housing Shortage Caused the Great Recession and Crippled Our Economy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), 16. Erdmann identifies Washington, DC, and Seattle as regions that share characteristics with closed access cities but that are not experiencing the same levels of outmigration because of high housing costs. Erdmann, *Shut Out*, 122–24.

environmental and quality-of-life reasons, ultimately overcame homevoter opposition with the passage of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan for Tysons. The Comprehensive Plan established a goal of increasing the number of residents in Tysons from about 20,000 to 100,000 and the number of jobs from 100,000 to 200,000.<sup>16</sup>

This case study analyzes the planning process and outcomes in the Tysons redevelopment. Section 2 examines the politics of redevelopment in general and in Tysons specifically. Section 3 covers the history of redevelopment planning for Tysons. Because the plan includes goals from many different interest groups, some of its goals are incompatible; Section 4 identifies these contradictions. Section 5 evaluates progress toward the goals the Comprehensive Plan established for the Tysons area 10 years after it was adopted. Section 6 concludes by identifying potential lessons that Tysons can offer to policymakers in other edge cities.

## **2. The Political Economy of Redevelopment Planning in Tysons**

The groups that supported redevelopment for Tysons—landowners and Smart Growth advocates—fit economist Bruce Yandle’s “bootleggers and Baptists” dynamic. He explains,

Bootleggers, you will remember, support Sunday closing laws that shut down all the local bars and liquor stores. Baptists support the same laws and lobby vigorously for them. Both parties gain, while the regulators are content because the law is easy to administer.<sup>17</sup>

Yandle shows that interest groups with divergent principles can form a successful coalition to support policy change.<sup>18</sup> While bootleggers support policy change for financial gain, Baptists support the same policy because they view it as socially beneficial.

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<sup>16</sup> Fairfax County, “Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan 2017 Edition,” 6.

<sup>17</sup> Bruce Yandle, “Bootleggers and Baptists: The Education of a Regulatory Economist,” *Regulation* 7, no. 3 (1983).

<sup>18</sup> Yandle, “Bootleggers and Baptists.”



The bootleggers and Baptists monikers are not normative. Bootleggers stand to profit from policy change while Baptists frame the change as socially beneficial. This does not mean that either bootleggers or Baptists are necessarily “bad” or “good.” In Yandle’s scenario, consumers of alcohol bear the brunt of new policies. However, in some cases, the bootlegger-and-Baptist dynamic can lead to policies that benefit consumers.

Land use regulations that limit the supply of housing in desirable locations hurt consumers, particularly low-income renters, by making housing more expensive.<sup>19</sup> To the extent that bootleggers and Baptists in Tysons made it politically feasible for policymakers to permit more residential development, consumers could benefit from lower housing prices.

In the Tysons case, the bootleggers were largely real estate interests that benefited both from the opening of the Silver Line, a major transit investment serving their properties, and from upzoning that increased their rights to build, which in turn increased the value of their land.<sup>20</sup> Baptists (the Smart Growth advocates, other environmentalists, and housing affordability advocates) supported construction around the new Metro stations to promote walkability, environmental sustainability, housing affordability, or a combination of these. In part because the task force crafted a plan for redevelopment in Tysons that limited impact on single-family neighborhoods, bootlegger and Baptist support for redevelopment was politically sufficient to overcome potential homevoter opposition, making it possible for the Board of Supervisors to implement the 2010 Comprehensive Plan and zoning amendments.

The planning process for redevelopment in Tysons cemented the alliance between bootleggers and Baptists. At the start of the redevelopment planning effort, the County Board of

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<sup>19</sup> Ikeda and Washington (now Hamilton), “How Land-Use Regulation Undermines Affordable Housing.”

<sup>20</sup> For an example of how upzoning near transit stations has increased property values, see Yonah Freemark, “Upzoning Chicago: Impacts of a Zoning Reform on Property Values and Housing Construction,” *Urban Affairs Review*, January 29, 2019.

Supervisors appointed a task force to develop planning recommendations. Task force membership included bootleggers, Baptists, and Fairfax homeowners, including representatives of neighborhood organizations. The plan they developed reflected all these constituencies' interests. As Section 3 will show, the Comprehensive Plan and zoning amendments that govern development in Tysons closely reflect the recommendations that the task force developed.

Allowing the type of development that the Comprehensive Plan calls for in Tysons is typically politically difficult. For many homeowners, their house is their largest financial asset. They are therefore highly motivated to oppose policies that could increase volatility in home prices or cause home values to fall.<sup>21</sup> They tend to be particularly opposed to the construction of comparatively low-cost multifamily housing.<sup>22</sup> Fischel identifies the rise of the environmentalist movement in the 1970s as a turning point in housing policy.<sup>23</sup> Blocking the construction of low-cost housing, or housing generally, for personal economic gain is not a sympathetic cause. But environmental concerns, such as the loss of open space or pollution caused by increased traffic, have provided homeowners with a way to frame their opposition to development as public-spirited.

Fischel demonstrates that local elected officials face incentives to implement policy that restricts housing development in accordance with homeowners' preferences. Homeowners are more likely to vote than are renters, and they are more likely to stay in the same jurisdiction over time.<sup>24</sup> These factors make them more influential constituents for local politicians relative to the

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<sup>21</sup> Fischel, *The Homevoter Hypothesis*, 9–10.

<sup>22</sup> William Fischel, "Fiscal Zoning and Economists' Views of the Property Tax" (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy Working Paper, Cambridge, MA, 2013), 4.

<sup>23</sup> William Fischel, "The Rise of Homevoters: How the Growth Machine Was Subverted by OPEC and Earth Day," in *Evidence and Innovation in Housing Law and Policy*, ed. Lee Anne Fennell and Benjamin J. Keys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Levine, *Zoned Out: Regulation, Markets, and Choices in Transportation and Metropolitan Land Use* (Washington, DC: RFF Press, 2005), 70.

renters who could potentially live in new multifamily housing. Local politicians tend to fare better when they keep homevoters happy by blocking policies that allow newcomers to move into their jurisdictions.

In their book *Neighborhood Defenders*, Katherine Levine Einstein, David M. Glick, and Maxwell Palmer offer an alternative to Fischel’s homevoter hypothesis with their concept of “neighborhood defenders.”<sup>25</sup> Neighborhood defenders are residents who oppose change near their residences and show up to planning commission meetings to voice their opposition. Based on their findings from gathering data on planning meetings in Massachusetts, they find evidence that neighborhood defenders tend to oppose any projects that would bring change to their neighborhoods even if the change, such as converting a vacant warehouse into residences, would likely increase their property values.<sup>26</sup> They describe the neighborhood defenders who attend planning meetings in Massachusetts:

We find that the individuals who participate in community meetings on new housing developments differ starkly from the broader population. They are older, whiter, longtime residents, and more likely to be homeowners. They overwhelmingly oppose the development of new housing, with only 15 percent of meeting attendees showing up to support proposed housing projects. In concert, the meeting minutes reveal that these forums are dominated by an unrepresentative group of neighborhood defenders.<sup>27</sup>

Einstein and colleagues provide empirical support for Fischel’s theory that environmental concerns play a large role in the publicly stated rationale that homevoters or neighborhood defenders present when they oppose new housing construction. They find that meeting attendees

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<sup>25</sup> Katherine Levine Einstein, David M. Glick, and Maxwell Palmer, *Neighborhood Defenders: Participatory Politics and America’s Housing Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

<sup>26</sup> Einstein, Glick, and Palmer, *Neighborhood Defenders*, 95.

<sup>27</sup> Einstein, Glick, and Palmer, *Neighborhood Defenders*, 97.

who speak in opposition to new housing proposals cite environmental concerns more often than any other reason besides traffic.<sup>28</sup>

In *Urban Land Use Planning*, Philip Berke and colleagues identify three interest groups that shape land use policy: neighbors who organize to oppose growth, real estate professionals who support growth, and minority and low-income tenant advocates with concerns about both environmental issues and economic opportunities.<sup>29</sup> Berke and colleagues explain that these political dynamics tend to result in little infill construction. However, after they developed this theory, a social-advocacy coalition that supports dense, infill housing development has emerged. In the Tysons planning process, this pro-housing coalition included environmentalists who support transit use and walkability to reduce carbon emissions relative to car travel; urbanists who prefer dense, walkable development aesthetically; and housing affordability advocates. More recently, similar groups supporting these goals have adopted the YIMBY (“yes, in my backyard”) moniker.<sup>30</sup> The Tysons redevelopment planning took place before these YIMBY groups emerged, but this fourth coalition in the Tysons land use policy debate, which could retroactively be described as having YIMBY tendencies, played a key role in developing the task force report and ultimately in the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan.

Fischel, Einstein and colleagues, and Berke and colleagues all emphasize how policy driven by homevoters or neighborhood defenders has limited opportunities for people to live in their preferred locations and has contributed to high housing costs. A different view comes from sociologist Harvey Molotch, who characterizes local obstructions to development as something

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<sup>28</sup> Einstein, Glick, and Palmer, *Neighborhood Defenders*, 117.

<sup>29</sup> Philip R. Berke et al., *Urban Land Use Planning*, 5th ed. (University of Illinois Press, 2006), 22.

<sup>30</sup> For an overview of YIMBY organizations and their work, see Conor Dougherty, *Golden Gates: Fighting for Housing in America* (New York: Penguin, 2020).

to strive for.<sup>31</sup> He argues that landowners and civic boosters work together to promote continual population growth and real estate development. He describes this “strategic coalition” as a vested interest in favor of development, which benefits local elites at the expense of cities’ other residents and local environmental quality.<sup>32</sup>

Molotch expressed optimism that anti-growth environmentalists could bring an end to the “growth machine” that supported new development in cities.<sup>33</sup> His analysis was prescient; Molotch pointed to policymakers in localities such as Boulder, Colorado, and Beverly Hills, California, as providing forward-thinking models of policy to limit housing development and local population growth.<sup>34</sup> Today, Boulder, Beverly Hills, and other communities where no-growth environmentalists are influential have strictly limited housing construction and population growth as a result.<sup>35</sup>

No- or low-growth policies may improve some aspects of local environmental quality, but Molotch fails to account for the negative environmental consequences they have more broadly.<sup>36</sup> Localities may be able to stop housing development within their own jurisdictions’ borders, but they cannot reduce regional demand for housing. One consequence of no-growth

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<sup>31</sup> Harvey Molotch, “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place,” *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 2 (1976).

<sup>32</sup> Molotch, “The City as a Growth Machine,” 318.

<sup>33</sup> Molotch, “The City as a Growth Machine,” 311.

<sup>34</sup> Molotch, “The City as a Growth Machine,” 327.

<sup>35</sup> In Boulder, for example, population grew rapidly between 1950 and 1970, more than tripling from 20,000 residents to nearly 67,000. Since then, Boulder’s population has grown at less than 10 percent per decade, and it is about 107,000 today, according to US Census Bureau, Decennial Census, and American Community Survey data. The median house price in Boulder is now nearly \$800,000. Zillow Research, ZHVI Single-Family Homes Time Series (\$) (dataset), accessed March 28, 2020, <https://www.zillow.com/research/data/>.

<sup>36</sup> When a locality in a growing region obstructs housing development within its borders, regional population will likely continue to grow, but housing for new residents will have to be built in a further-flung location. The pattern leads to more farmland or wild land being developed, resulting in habitat loss. It also results in more people with longer driving commutes than would otherwise result. One study estimates that if people who work in Boulder were able to find and afford housing there, vehicle miles traveled could be reduced by 245 million annually. Abigail Bradford et al., *Growing Greener: The Environmental Benefits of a Compact and Connected Boulder* (Denver, CO: Environment Colorado Research and Policy Center, 2019), 10.

policies is that new homes to accommodate new residents must be built in outlying locations where homeowner opposition is lower than in developed areas.<sup>37</sup> When all new development in high-demand regions must occur on greenfields at the outskirts of existing development, building new housing harms wildlife habitat, requires new infrastructure, and also causes residents to commute farther to job centers relative to what would be possible if infill construction were allowed in places closer to employment centers.

In response to environmental problems caused by decades of anti-growth activism that Molotch supported, some influential environmental activists have adopted stances supporting infill development. For example, the Sierra Club now has an urban infill platform that supports allowing dense development, particularly in locations served by transit.<sup>38</sup> Not all environmental organizations support infill development today, however. Even within the Sierra Club, some local chapters are much less supportive of infill development—and lean toward the no-growth advocacy position—relative to the national organization.<sup>39</sup>

The no-growth environmental movement has historically had a presence in Fairfax County. Former Fairfax County Supervisor Audrey Moore built her political career by supporting large lot zoning and the preservation of local open space in order to improve local water quality and limit traffic.<sup>40</sup> She served on the county board for 20 years, including four as

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<sup>37</sup> Molotch argued that allowing real estate development would benefit a locality's elites at the expense of low-income residents and racial minorities. However, anti-growth policies have in fact resulted in the displacement of low-income, disproportionately minority residents from anti-growth localities. For background on the racist history of US local government regulations, including zoning restrictions and federal housing policy, see Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> Sierra Club, "Urban and Land-Use Policies: Urban Infill," accessed February 10, 2019, [https://www.sierraclub.org/sites/www.sierraclub.org/files/Infill%20Policy\\_5.18.2019.pdf](https://www.sierraclub.org/sites/www.sierraclub.org/files/Infill%20Policy_5.18.2019.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> Sasha Perigo, "Why Does the Sierra Club Oppose Affordable Housing?," *Curbed*, February 6, 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Antonio Olivo, "Audrey Moore, Fairfax County Supervisor and Environmentalist, Dies at 89," *Washington Post*, December 19, 2018.

board chair.<sup>41</sup> In an interview explaining how she developed her views on development, Moore cited her commute to Manhattan as a student: “I would sit on that train and look out at the apartments on West 125th Street and think that was terrible.”<sup>42</sup>

Today, environmentalists widely recognize that, relative to many parts of the United States, Manhattan is an environmentally friendly place to live. It has among the country’s lowest greenhouse gas emissions per capita because of a low rate of trips in single-occupancy vehicles and nearly ubiquitous attached housing that is efficient to heat and cool relative to detached single-family homes.<sup>43</sup> The Tysons task force report demonstrates that the environmentalists on the task force recognized the benefits of allowing infill development relative to a slow- or no-growth approach within Fairfax County. The Tysons plan that the county ultimately adopted looks like the growth machine—an alliance of real estate interests and boosters of local growth—at work in part because they had the support of environmentalists who believe no-growth policies are actually environmentally detrimental.

During the Tysons redevelopment planning process, officials and residents repeatedly cited neighboring Arlington County’s Rosslyn-Ballston corridor as their model for success.<sup>44</sup> Arlington sits about eight miles to the east of Tysons, across the Potomac River from Washington, DC. Consisting of plantations and small farms until the Civil War, Arlington saw extensive development in the early 20th century as a streetcar suburb of Washington, DC.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Olivo, “Audrey Moore.”

<sup>42</sup> Olivo, “Audrey Moore.”

<sup>43</sup> David Owen, *Green Metropolis* (New York: Penguin, 2009), chap. 1.

<sup>44</sup> PB Placemaking for Tysons Task Force, “Transforming Tysons: Vision and Area Wide Recommendations,” September 15, 2008, <http://www.cdctyson.com/images/TransformingTysons.pdf>, 57. Likewise, the bicycle infrastructure plan for Tysons also cites the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor as a model. Fairfax County Department of Transportation, “Fairfax County Bicycle Master Plan—Phase 1: Tysons Corner Area,” April 2011, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/transportation/sites/transportation/files/assets/documents/pdf/transportation%20projects,%20studies%20and%20plans/countywide%20bicycle%20master%20plan/tysonsbikemasterplanchapters.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> John E. Merriken, *Old Dominion Trolley Too: A History of the Mount Vernon Line* (Dallas: L.O. King, Jr, 1987).

While the majority of the county was developed as detached, single-family-home neighborhoods, it sits on a dense network of relatively narrow streets, as all development did before cars came into widespread use. Unlike in Tysons, walkable development was able to proceed in Arlington without requiring a new street grid.

The Rosslyn-Ballston corridor is served by five stations on WMATA's Orange Line, built in the 1970s. Ahead of the arrival of the Orange Line, Arlington County underwent a redevelopment plan with goals similar to the Tysons redevelopment plan. Arlington policymakers adopted a zoning code that accommodates dense, mixed-use development on the land adjacent to its Metro stations. In part as a result of this zoning reform, the county's population has grown by more than one-third since 1970. Between 2000 and 2010, more than 90 percent of the county's population growth was accommodated in new multifamily housing units, mostly centered around Metro stations.<sup>46</sup> The American Planning Association has said of Arlington's planning,

Arlington has experienced a remarkable transformation from a suburban, auto centric collection of neighborhoods to one of this country's most recognized examples of the benefits of smart growth, sustainability, walkability and transit oriented development.<sup>47</sup>

Arlington has shown Fairfax County residents and policymakers that it is possible for growth not to be accompanied with increased traffic congestion. Traffic on many of Arlington's

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<sup>46</sup> Arlington County, "Demographics, Forecasts and Projections," chap. 2 in *Arlington Community Facilities Study*, March 19, 2015, 9, [https://commissions.arlingtonva.us/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/11/CFS\\_FinalReportCompanion-Part2web.pdf](https://commissions.arlingtonva.us/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/11/CFS_FinalReportCompanion-Part2web.pdf). Boulder has accommodated more population growth than Arlington since Arlington planners upzoned for Metro. But while Arlington's growth has been accommodated entirely through infill development, the Boulder area has extensive greenfield sites available.

<sup>47</sup> American Planning Association, "Arlington County's Smart Growth Journey, Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor—Implementing the General Land Use Plan," 2017, <http://www.pgplanning.org/DocumentCenter/View/9199/Article-on-Arlington-County-SGJRB-Corridor-9-18>, 1.



corridors has actually declined since the 1990s, in part because 40 percent of residents now take transit to work.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to the potential transportation benefits of building housing near transit, fiscal realities likely led Fairfax County residents to favor the Arlington model.<sup>49</sup> In general, local policymakers tend to support office and retail development and shun residential development, particularly relatively low-cost multifamily development. This practice is known as “fiscal zoning,”<sup>50</sup> referring to local policymakers pursuing zoning policies that increase their tax revenues relative to their obligations.

Commercial development provides localities with increased property and sales tax revenues and requires few government services in return. Compared with commercial development, residential development requires more government services relative to the taxes new residents will pay. This effect is greatest for multifamily construction that is home to children who will attend public schools and that generates lower per-unit property tax revenues than new single-family construction.

Dating to at least 1976, when a special commission formed to identify opportunities to fill revenue shortfalls for Fairfax County, Tysons, with its extensive office and retail development, has been viewed as key to the county’s fiscal health.<sup>51</sup> Typical fiscal zoning patterns have started to falter in Tysons, however. Since the peak of its office market in the late 1990s, when vacancy rates were below 2 percent, Tysons has been losing office tenants to

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<sup>48</sup> Luke Mullins, “The Audacious Plan to Turn a Sprawling DC Suburb into a Big City,” *Washingtonian*, March 29, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> The task force pointed to fiscal concerns as a guiding planning principle in their report: “Move Tysons forward within its existing boundaries as the employment and commercial economic engine of the region and an expanding contributor to the tax base of Fairfax County.” PB Placemaking for Tysons Task Force, “Transforming Tysons,” x.

<sup>50</sup> J. M. Pogodzinski, “The Effects of Fiscal and Exclusionary Zoning on Household Location: A Critical Review,” *Journal of Housing Research* 2, no. 2 (1991).

<sup>51</sup> Nicholas A. Phelps, “The Growth Machine Stops? Urban Politics and the Making and Remaking of an Edge City,” *Urban Affairs Review* 48, no. 5 (2012).

Washington, DC, and Arlington, where they are willing to pay higher rents to locate in more urban, walkable neighborhoods.<sup>52</sup> This is part of a national trend; many suburban office parks across the country have been deemed obsolete by real estate industry analysts, as companies have been leaving aging office parks in favor of urban locations that are more appealing to their workforce.<sup>53</sup> Both the task force report and Comprehensive Plan framed allowing more housing to be built in Tysons as a means to an end of achieving walkability rather than a goal in itself.

In addition to the fiscal realities that helped make redevelopment in Tysons appealing to Fairfax County residents, the redevelopment plan likely passed in part because of its buffered effect on homeowners. The plan allows for transit-oriented development (TOD) in the four areas closest to the new Metro stations while identifying four surrounding neighborhoods within the Tysons planning area that are not zoned for TOD. No single-family homes are located in the TOD areas. Within the four non-TOD neighborhoods, there are very few detached single-family houses and some townhouses. The plan does not upzone any of these residences.<sup>54</sup>

The history of large landowners in Tysons has led to a particularly intertwined relationship between concentrated real estate interests and local policymakers that gives real

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<sup>52</sup> Mullins, “The Audacious Plan to Turn a Sprawling DC Suburb into a Big City.”

<sup>53</sup> Newmark Grubb Knight Frank, “Suburban Office Obsolescence: Quantifying Challenges and Opportunities,” *Architexturez*, September 2015, 5.

<sup>54</sup> A small number of single-family homes sit within the West Side planning area, which makes up the non-TOD zone to the west of both the Greensboro and Spring Hill TOD planning areas. During the planning process for a new development at the Spring Hill metro in 2012, the Georgelas Group sought to purchase two of these homes to use their land as required park space for the new development. The Comprehensive Plan calls for the county to use eminent domain to purchase private land for the plan’s called-for park space if buyers cannot come to an agreement with owners for purchase. Under eminent domain the property owner would be compensated for the property’s assessed value, so that’s what the Georgelas Group offered. However, at least one property owner did not want to sell at that price because she had been offered a higher price for her home from another potential buyer. See Dave Webster, “Fairfax County’s Improper Land Grab,” *Patch*, June 24, 2013. Ultimately, the county purchased other homes on Raglan Road to create new park space with funds proffered from the Spring Hill development. See Fairfax County Park Authority, “Park Authority Adds Acre to Raglan Road Park in Vienna,” June 19, 2019, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/park-news/2019/z-ir097>.

estate interests special political influence.<sup>55</sup> In 1962, Gerald Halpin, Tom Nicholson, Rudolph Seeley, and Charlie Ewing founded West-Group, beginning with one office park in Tysons and eventually owning more than 100 buildings.<sup>56</sup> It is possible that the presence of large, powerful real estate interests in Tysons and in the region as a whole has contributed to the DC region's relative permissiveness toward housing development relative to other high-income coastal regions.

At the time of redevelopment planning, West-Group owned 142 acres of land in Tysons, or nearly 7 percent of the entire area. The firm was closely involved in the redevelopment planning process.<sup>57</sup> After purchasing West-Group's portfolio in 2010, DLJ Real Estate Capital Partners became a major area landowner.<sup>58</sup> The sales price was less than initially expected, likely because the zoning amendment for Tysons ended up allowing less dense office development than the task force report recommended.<sup>59</sup>

As a whole, the Washington region has been more open to new housing construction, and specifically transit-oriented development, than many other coastal regions in the country. The reason for this regional relative openness to transit-oriented development is beyond the scope of this paper. However other, smaller-scale areas of transit-oriented redevelopment in the region

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<sup>55</sup> In his analysis of Tysons as an edge city, Joel Garreau calls the networks of landowners and other real estate interests, civic associations, and these groups' networks with county officials "shadow governments" in Tysons. Garreau explains that during the 1940s through the 1970s, when Tysons took shape as an edge city, lawyer and developer John Tilghman "Til" Hazel Jr. played a key role in condemning land for where Interstate 495 would be built. Hazel advocated for development in Fairfax County (including George Mason University) and ultimately developed housing and commercial real estate in Northern Virginia. In the 1960s, Theodore Lerner entered the Tysons market, purchasing a large parcel of farmland that had previously belonged to William Tyson, for whom the area is named and where the Tysons Corner Metro station now sits. Lerner went on to develop the two large shopping malls that Tysons is well known for, along with surrounding hotels and retail. Garreau, *Edge City*, 187.

<sup>56</sup> Jon Banister, "Titan of Tysons: Visionary Developer Gerald Halpin Dies at 94," *Forbes*, August 16, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Tierney Plumb, "Deal of the Year: West-Group Tysons Corner Portfolio," *Washington Business Journal*, April 29, 2011.

<sup>58</sup> Banister, "Titan of Tysons."

<sup>59</sup> Sarah Krouse, "Details of West-Group's Sale to DLJ Real Estate Capital Partners," *Washington Business Journal*, August 2, 2010.

include Silver Spring and White Flint in Montgomery County, Maryland, and the Mosaic District near the Dunn Loring Metro station in Fairfax County. In a survey of walkable areas within urban areas across the country, Christopher Leinberger identifies the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria metropolitan area as having the highest percentage of residents who live in a walkable urban place.<sup>60</sup> Redevelopment planning for Tysons stands out even within the DC region for its size and scope.

Tysons is an illustration of the growth machine Molotch describes, a symbiotic relationship between policymakers and real estate interests at work. As is common in local politics, individuals and firms in the real estate industry are an important source of campaign contributions for candidates running for seats on the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. In the six elections since Tysons redevelopment planning began, real estate industry contributions have totaled 18.2 percent of all donations to Fairfax County supervisor campaigns.<sup>61</sup> The redevelopment planning period for Tysons, 2004 through 2010, corresponded with an increase in real estate industry campaign contributions as a percentage of total donations, from 14.3 percent in 2003 to nearly 20 percent in the three following elections.<sup>62</sup> Figure 2 shows real estate industry campaign contributions as a percentage of total campaign contributions and as a percentage of winning candidates' campaign contributions from 1999 through 2019, the period for which campaign finance data are available.

Fairfax County held a special election in 2009 after Board Chair Gerry Connolly, a Democrat, was elected to the United States Congress. In this special election, the chair and one

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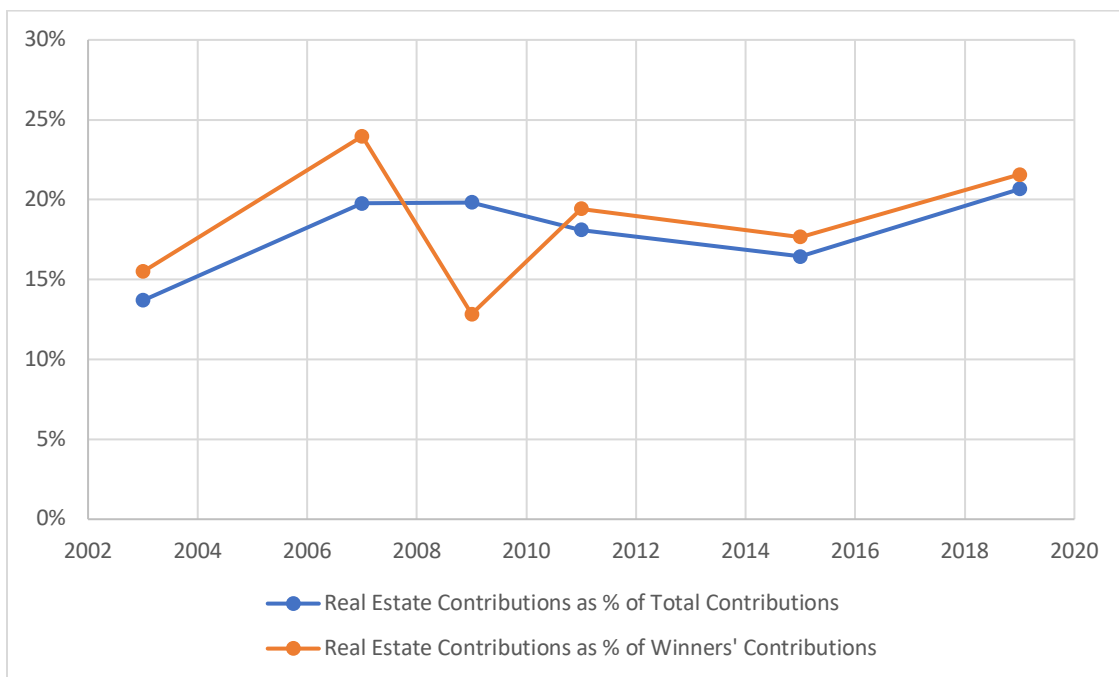
<sup>60</sup> Christopher Leinberger, *Footloose and Fancy Free: A Field Survey of Walkable Urban Places in the Top 30 U.S. Metropolitan Areas* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2016).

<sup>61</sup> Author's calculations use data from the Virginia Public Access Project, which provides data on donors to Fairfax County candidates for local office by industry. Virginia Public Access Project, "Donors," Fairfax County, 1999–2019, accessed November 2019, <https://www.vpap.org/localities/fairfax-county-va/donors/>.

<sup>62</sup> Virginia Public Access Project, "Donors."

other board seat were open. In all other elections for which campaign spending and contribution data are available, real estate industry contributions disproportionately went to winning candidates. In the special election, however, real estate industry money disproportionately went to losing candidates, driven by contributions to Republican Pat Herrity, candidate for at-large supervisor and chair.

**Figure 2. Fairfax County Campaign Contributions from the Real Estate Industry**



Source: Author’s calculations using data from Virginia Public Access Project, “Donors,” Fairfax County, 1999–2019, accessed November 2019, <https://www.vpap.org/localities/fairfax-county-va/donors/>.

Herrity lost narrowly to Democrat Sharon Bulova, who served as chair until she retired in 2020. Both candidates were current supervisors and campaigned on growth and redevelopment in Tysons. However, Herrity supported reducing requirements for developers to provide income-restricted housing for middle-income households relative to what the task force recommended.

He supported spending increased property tax revenue from development on transportation infrastructure instead.<sup>63</sup>

No members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors have lost reelection campaigns following the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan for Tysons in 2010. The composition of the board has been the same since 2009, with the exception of Michael Frey and Gerald Hyland, who retired along with Bulova.

The real estate interests that supported redevelopment planning in Tysons through campaign contributions, their task force work, and other activism were rewarded with increased development opportunities as a result of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan and zoning amendments. The parcels of land immediately surrounding Metro stations in Tysons, zoned for the highest intensity in the area, are worth far more than parcels slightly farther away. Figure 3 shows the land areas that are one-eighth, one-quarter, one-half, and one mile away from the Tysons Metro stations mapped onto Fairfax County's census tracts. In 2018, an acre of land between one-half mile and one mile away from any of the four Tysons Metro stations (shown in blue in Figure 3) is worth on average \$1.4 million per acre.<sup>64</sup> Parcels sold for redevelopment in the land within one-eighth mile of the Metro stations are selling for multiples of this value, for as much as \$5 million to

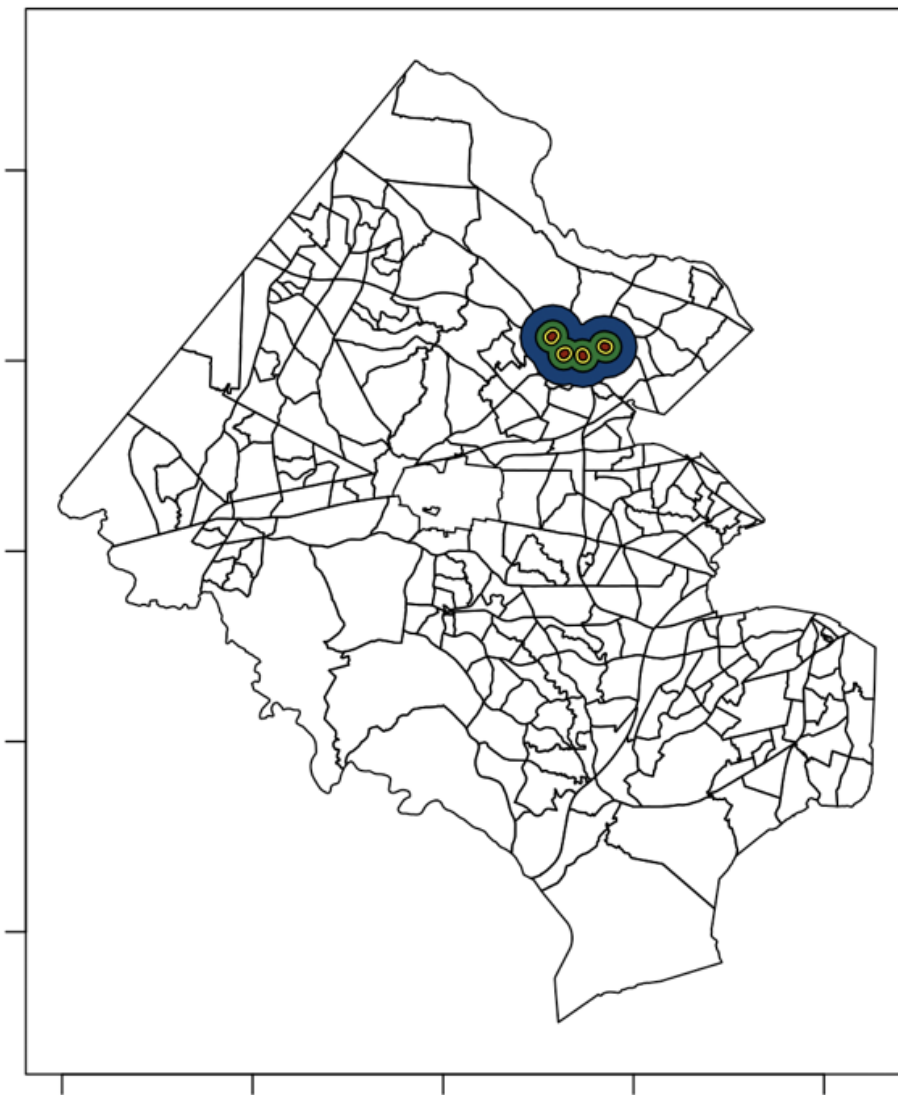
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<sup>63</sup> Aubrey Whelan, "Fairfax Board Clashes over Tysons Corner Housing," *Washington Examiner*, June 7, 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Land price data for land between one-half mile and one mile from the Tysons area Metro stations are from William Larson et al., "The Price of Residential Land for Counties, ZIP Codes, and Census Tracts in the United States" (Federal Housing Finance Agency Working Paper 19-01, Washington, DC, January 2, 2019). I used their data on land prices at the census tract level and created a weighted average of the census tracts that make up the land between one-half and one mile from the four Tysons Metro stations. Their methodology relies on single-family home sales to estimate land value. They provide data at the census tract level covering 97 percent of the land between one-half and one mile from the four Tysons Metro stations. Because there are few single-family homes in the bands closer to the Metro stations, I am not able to use their data to estimate land prices in the bands closer to the Metro stations. So I rely on news reports for some examples of land sale prices within one-eighth mile of the Metro stations, which is the land that has been upzoned the most and benefits most from proximity to the Metro stations.

\$10 million per acre.<sup>65</sup> Land prices in Tysons would be much higher were it not for Tysons-specific property taxes and development fees that are capitalized into land prices, covered in section 3.

**Figure 3. Planning Radii Surrounding the Tysons Metro Stations**



Source: Image by Robert Orr.

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<sup>65</sup> Keith Loria, "Tysons Parcel Primed for Redevelopment Commands \$60.2M," *Commercial Observer*, November 19, 2019. The Fairfax County Board recently purchased 1.8 acres from a developer for \$16.6 million. See Daniel J. Sernovitz, "Fairfax County Acquires Former Tysons Container Store," *Washington Business Journal*, October 9, 2019.

While landowners and developers stood to profit from Tysons redevelopment planning, support from public-spirited activists, who supported redevelopment for environmental or affordability reasons, was just as important to the Comprehensive Plan's adoption. Of the 36 members of the task force, 6 of them included environmental professional or volunteer work in their bios.<sup>66</sup> The Comprehensive Plan reflects many of the policies that the task force recommended to mitigate the environmental impact of building in Tysons, including requirements for 20 fields along with other greenspace and a mandate that all redevelopment projects meet the US Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver standards or better.<sup>67</sup>

The goals of the real estate and environmentalist coalitions align well in Tysons. Urban planning professors Jonathan Levine and Aseem Inam explain that land use regulations are likely responsible for the prevalence of greenfield development in the United States, which causes more environmental damage and longer, more car-intensive commutes relative to infill construction. In many cases, new subdivisions on the edges of urban development are the only type of new housing that land use regulations permit. In a nationwide survey of developers published in 2004, Levine and Inam find that most developers perceived an inadequate supply of housing in dense, walkable neighborhoods relative to demand.<sup>68</sup> Developers who were surveyed attributed the mismatch to zoning regulations. These regulations stand in the way of both profit opportunities for the real estate industry and infill development that is less environmentally damaging than greenfield development.

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<sup>66</sup> The task force included John Jennison, Stella Koch, George Lamb, and Wade Smith, who all indicated that they worked for environmentalist organizations either professionally or in a volunteer capacity. PB Placemaking for Tysons Task Force, "Transforming Tysons," appendix A.

<sup>67</sup> Fairfax County, "Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan 2017 Edition," 37.

<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Levine and Aseem Inam, "The Market for Transportation-Land Use Integration: Do Developers Want Smarter Growth than Regulations Allow?," *Transportation* 31, no. 4 (2004), 409–27.



Besides supporting increased building density through zoning reforms, environmental activists on the task force supported extensive new park space and open space in Tysons. They cited goals both of providing active and civic space and of reducing stormwater runoff.<sup>69</sup>

The task force also included affordable housing advocates. Extensive research has shown that restricting housing construction, particularly multifamily construction, increases house prices.<sup>70</sup> In turn, housing supply constraints harm low-income renters in particular. In cases where new housing construction replaces existing, relatively low-cost housing, the hyperlocal effect of housing construction on prices may be ambiguous.<sup>71</sup> Because redevelopment in Tysons permitted housing construction where car dealerships, big-box stores, and office parks stood, this was not a concern for Fairfax housing affordability advocates.

Section 3 will show that the planning process reinforced the alignment of these groups by creating specific benefits for activists with each new development project. Combined with the county's relatively low level of homeowner opposition, increased residential density in Tysons is proceeding according to the task force's recommendations.

### **3. The Planning Process in Tysons**

Before appointing the task force to design a plan for TOD in Tysons, Fairfax County policymakers had already considered land use planning that anticipated rail to Dulles. In 1994, the county's Board of Supervisors adopted a Comprehensive Plan amendment for Tysons reflecting locations for three potential Metro stations. The 1994 plan shared the current plan's

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<sup>69</sup> PB Placemaking for Tysons Task Force, "Transforming Tysons," v, 61.

<sup>70</sup> For a review of the economic literature on the relationship between land use regulations and housing supply, see Joseph Gyourko and Raven Molloy, "Regulation and Housing Supply" (NBER Working Paper No. 20536, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, October 2014).

<sup>71</sup> Vicki Been, Ingrid Gould Ellen, and Katherine O'Regan, "Supply Skepticism: Housing Supply and Affordability," *Housing Policy Debate* 29, no.1 (2018).

goal of transforming Tysons into a more urban area and continuing its role as the county’s “downtown.”<sup>72</sup> Unlike the 2010 plan, the 1994 plan remained merely a vision document and was not reflected in zoning changes or denser development in Tysons.<sup>73</sup>

While policymakers had discussed rail to Dulles and TOD planning in Tysons for decades, serious steps toward planning for the Silver Line began in 2005 when the Fairfax County Board appointed 36 members to the Tysons Task Force. The task force’s role was to hold meetings with homeowners, real estate firms, and other businesses to craft suggestions for redevelopment planning that reflected all stakeholders’ interests. Members of the task force held over 100 meetings and workshops to gather public feedback.<sup>74</sup> They developed a plan supporting TOD in Tysons with the goal of facilitating population and economic growth without worsening the area’s notorious traffic.<sup>75</sup> The task force played an important role in shaping the planning objectives and ultimately the zoning and transportation reforms that were reflected in the Tysons Comprehensive Plan and zoning reforms.

The task force included members representing the three key political groups that were needed to implement the plan—real estate professionals, public advocates, and representatives of homeowner organizations.<sup>76</sup> All three groups’ key concerns were reflected in the task force’s report and ultimately in the Comprehensive Plan and zoning amendments.

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<sup>72</sup> Fairfax County, “Adopted Text for Plan Amendment 2007–23 (Tysons Corner Urban Center) for Fairfax County, Va.,” 1, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/zoning/2007-23.pdf>. This text was adopted on June 22, 2010.

<sup>73</sup> Avery Bowron, “Visions of the Future as Spaces of Engagement: The Political Economy of Transit-Oriented Redevelopment in Tysons Corner, VA,” *Cities in the 21st Century* 2, no. 1 (2010), 16.

<sup>74</sup> Fairfax County, “Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan 2017 Edition,” 4.

<sup>75</sup> For an overview of transit-oriented design and implementation in the United States, see Hank Dittmar and Gloria Ohland, eds., *The New Transit Town: Best Practices in Transit-Oriented Development* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004).

<sup>76</sup> Appendix A of the task force’s report includes biographies of all the members. Their affiliation information shows that homevoters, bootleggers, and Baptists were all well represented. PB Placemaking for Tysons Task Force, “Transforming Tysons.”

In 2008, the task force worked with a team of consultants and county officials to publish a document called “Transforming Tysons: Vision and Area Wide Recommendations” to present to the Board of Supervisors. Various real estate professionals and businesses interests were represented on the task force. They included business owners and several Chambers of Commerce chapter members and employees of major Tysons real estate interests—the Georgelas Group, a major area developer, and West-Group, the largest landowner. Public-oriented activists included representatives for several causes including environmentalists, parks supporters, pedestrian and cyclist advocates, and supporters of affordable housing.<sup>77</sup>

Homeowners and members of neighborhood organizations also served on the task force, including Chairman Clark Tyler, a former board member of the McLean Citizens Association, which is an influential homeowner organization. Many members of the task force were longtime Fairfax County homeowners, and nearly a third of the task force (10 members) represented homeowner organizations. If advocates of Molotchian no-growth policies were on the task force, their views were not reflected in the task force’s report, which provided enthusiastic support for TOD and population growth in the area immediately surrounding the new Metro stations.

The report by the task force aggregated the goals of its memberships’ diverse interests by promoting zoning reforms that would allow for significantly increased development exclusively around the new transit stations, maintaining the status quo for single-family neighborhoods and creating buffer zones around the transit stops to transition from high- to low-density development.

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<sup>77</sup> PB Placemaking for Tysons Task Force, “Transforming Tysons.”

Furthermore, the Comprehensive Plan requires that a developer-funded infrastructure and public service requirements be in place before permitting new development, in order to prevent new residents in Tysons from causing increased traffic congestion or crowding in public spaces in other parts of the county. The plan reads as follows:

Incremental redevelopment must be balanced by having infrastructure in place when needed, such as the Circulator System, the new grid of streets, parks and recreational facilities, schools and fire stations to successfully support an increased population in Tysons. Each step of redevelopment in Tysons needs to move in the direction of achieving the vision laid out in the Plan. The phasing of development is essential to assure the provision of public facilities. . . .

Development approved in later phases should be triggered by achievement of trip reduction objectives and the provision of the infrastructure and other transportation improvements set forth . . . in the Transportation section.<sup>78</sup>

The task force developed a plan for growth that would minimize the impact on single-family neighborhoods. Since redevelopment began, homeowners have been particularly concerned that roads had not been widened sufficiently to maintain current levels of traffic flow as population and jobs have grown. They have also held county policymakers to achieving the goal of permitting primarily residential rather than office development, which they argued would cause more traffic.<sup>79</sup> In a comment on the 2017 update to the Comprehensive Plan for Tysons, the McLean Citizens Association characterized county policymakers' promises to Fairfax residents outside of the Tysons area as follows:

First, to ensure that public infrastructure construction in Tysons proceeds in tandem with and is in place prior to development that yields major increases in intensity; Second, to ensure that Tysons is a place where people can live, work, and play; and Third, to ensure

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<sup>78</sup> Fairfax County, "Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan 2017 Edition," 31.

<sup>79</sup> McLean Citizens Association, "Resolution on Tysons Implementation Plan Amendment (S13-II-TY1)," March 10, 2017, 1, [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/comprehensive\\_plan/mca\\_resolution\\_on\\_tysons\\_imp\\_plan\\_amendment.pdf](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/comprehensive_plan/mca_resolution_on_tysons_imp_plan_amendment.pdf).

that negative impacts on the surrounding communities are mitigated and that Tysons growth does not come at the expense of the quality of life in these communities.<sup>80</sup>

However, maintaining current speeds for an increasing number of drivers in Tysons is directly at odds with the area becoming more walkable. If Tysons successfully followed the Arlington model, as has been the county's objective since the task force report, then new road infrastructure would not be needed in order to maintain or improve on current levels of traffic congestion and delay. But, in fact, the median travel time to work for Fairfax County residents has increased slightly from 31.3 minutes in 2010 to 32.1 minutes in 2017.<sup>81</sup> So far, Tysons is accommodating growth in part by widening major thoroughfares, with the view that growth in Tysons will be accompanied by an increase in traffic.<sup>82</sup> Accommodating growth by maintaining the level of service for drivers on Tysons's roads is at odds with the goal of Tysons becoming more walkable and safer for pedestrians.<sup>83</sup>

After the task force submitted its report to the county board, five members worked with Fairfax County planning staff and sought community engagement to create the first Comprehensive Plan for Tysons. Members of the task force were in a privileged position to advance their private interests in the Comprehensive Plan and related zoning amendments for Tysons that the county board ultimately adopted. The plan reflected several priorities identified in the task force's report, including planning for high-density TOD around the Metro stations, with less dense development in the surrounding areas; requiring new developments to provide

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<sup>80</sup> Sally K. Horn, "Planning Commission Oral Testimony," McLean Citizens Association, February 8, 2017, [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/Assets/Documents/PDF/Comprehensive\\_Plan/mca\\_-\\_tysons\\_oral\\_testimony\\_02-08-17.pdf](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/Assets/Documents/PDF/Comprehensive_Plan/mca_-_tysons_oral_testimony_02-08-17.pdf).

<sup>81</sup> US Census Bureau, "Commuting Characteristics by Sex, 2013–2017," American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

<sup>82</sup> Fairfax County, "Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report on the Implementation of the Comprehensive Plan," September 2019, 20–22, [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/annual\\_reports/tysons%20annual%20report%202019%20final%20for%20web.pdf](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/annual_reports/tysons%20annual%20report%202019%20final%20for%20web.pdf).

<sup>83</sup> Jonathan Levine, Joe Grengs, and Louis A. Merlin, *From Mobility to Accessibility: Transforming Urban Transportation and Land-Use Planning* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 142–43.

below-market-rate housing or contribute to an affordable housing fund; creating new pedestrian-scale streets; focusing on decreasing the jobs-to-housing ratio in Tysons; prioritizing parks and arts space; and implementing a circulator bus to complement the Silver Line.<sup>84</sup> The task force developed a land use map that closely resembles the county's current zoning map for Tysons.<sup>85</sup>

The task force recommended allowing denser office development in the TOD planning areas than the Tysons zoning amendments permit. It recommended allowing up to 6.0 FAR for all development within one-eighth mile of a Metro station with potential bonus density for meeting environmental standards and for providing income-restricted housing in residential developments.<sup>86</sup> The actually implemented zoning ordinance restricts office development to 2.5 FAR, with no FAR restrictions on other types of development, in an effort to encourage residential, retail, and hotel rather than office development.

Following the adoption of the Tysons Comprehensive Plan in 2010, the task force's work was complete. In 2012 a new organization, the Tysons Partnership, was established as a successor stakeholder organization. The Tysons Partnership is a nonprofit with the mission to "ensure that the overarching goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan for Tysons are achieved."<sup>87</sup> Like the task force, the Tysons Partnership is a platform for interest groups to influence public policy. Unlike the task force, the Tysons Partnership membership is made up primarily of real estate interests without representation of environmental or housing activists or homeowners' organizations. The county also serves a role in the Tysons Partnership with an *ex officio* membership.

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<sup>84</sup> Fairfax County, "Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan 2017 Edition," 6.

<sup>85</sup> PB Placemaking for Tysons Task Force, "Transforming Tysons," v.

<sup>86</sup> PB Placemaking for Tysons Task Force, "Transforming Tysons," 39.

<sup>87</sup> Tysons Partnership, "Mission," accessed February 13, 2020, <https://www.tysonspartnership.org/about-us/mission/>.

Since the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors adopted the first Comprehensive Plan for Tysons in 2010, an amendment was adopted in 2013 that created more flexibility for standards for public facilities and infrastructure. In 2017 the county adopted a revised Comprehensive Plan to reflect new details on funding for infrastructure and public services with the establishment of various funds and development fees.

Public comments submitted in response to the 2013 revisions show that tensions began emerging between real estate interests and homeowner organizations about how development should proceed and what level of public benefits developers should be required to provide.

The Comprehensive Plan exerts a high level of influence on Tysons development and allows organizations like the Tysons Partnership to be particularly influential too, giving policymakers extensive leeway to subjectively approve or deny projects or to require changes to development proposals.

In addition to the Comprehensive Plan and zoning amendments, county departments have published additional guidance documents for development. These include design standards for buildings and infrastructure,<sup>88</sup> a parks plan,<sup>89</sup> and a bicycle infrastructure plan.<sup>90</sup>

In some cases, comprehensive plans are little more than exercises in checking off boxes. States require municipalities to complete these plans when implementing zoning ordinances and other land use regulations that actually govern development.<sup>91</sup> This is not the case in Tysons. The zoning ordinance specifically defers to county planners and elected officials to interpret the

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<sup>88</sup> Fairfax County Office of Community Revitalization, “Tysons Urban Design Guidelines,” February 24, 2017, [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/urban%20design/tysons\\_udg.pdf](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/urban%20design/tysons_udg.pdf).

<sup>89</sup> Fairfax County Park Authority, “Tysons Park System Concept Plan,” October 22, 2014, [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/tysonsparkssystem\\_cp\\_102214.pdf](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/tysonsparkssystem_cp_102214.pdf).

<sup>90</sup> Fairfax County Department of Transportation, “Fairfax County Bicycle Master Plan.”

<sup>91</sup> Della Rucker, “Why Comprehensive Plans Gather Dust,” Planners Web Article 540, August 2, 2011, <http://plannersweb.com/2011/08/why-comprehensive-plans-gather-dust/>.

Comprehensive Plan and determine whether or not a development proposal furthers the plan's goals:

The [Planned Tysons Corner] PTC District is established for the Tysons Corner Urban Center as defined in the adopted comprehensive plan to implement the mix of uses, densities and intensities under the redevelopment option set forth in the adopted comprehensive plan. The PTC District regulations are designed to provide the necessary flexibility to transform the designated Tysons Corner Urban Center area from a suburban office park and activity center into an urban, mixed-use, transit, bicycle and pedestrian oriented community to promote high standards in urban design, layout and construction and to otherwise implement the stated purpose and intent of this Ordinance.<sup>92</sup>

Local policymakers have the discretion to award density rights beyond what zoning permits if they determine the project is furthering the objectives in the Comprehensive Plan.<sup>93</sup>

The plan encouraged large parcels of at least 20 acres to make it feasible for developers to provide public benefits, such as a new street grid, which helped to build environmentalist and housing affordability activist support for redevelopment.<sup>94</sup> However, this approach sharply reduces the opportunities for small developers or homebuilders to compete in the Tysons market. Furthermore, the requirement for developers to provide public services and the authority for policymakers to use their discretion to determine how these services will be provided further intertwines the relationship between Tysons's real estate interests and policymakers. Economists Meg Tuszynski and Richard Wagner call this relationship an "entangled political economy."<sup>95</sup> As policymakers are shaping developers' opportunities to build, developers are also shaping policymakers' abilities to meet their constituents' demands.

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<sup>92</sup> Fairfax County, "Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance," 51.

<sup>93</sup> County policymakers have used this discretion in approving a new development at the Spring Hill Metro station called The View. The project will be 600 feet tall, exceeding the height limit in the Tysons zoning ordinance by 50 percent. However, because county policymakers determined that the project advanced the Comprehensive Plan objectives, it has received approval. Alex Koma, "Fairfax County Approves Tysons Project Featuring What Would Be Region's Tallest Building," *Washington Business Journal*, October 16, 2019.

<sup>94</sup> Fairfax County, "Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan 2017 Edition," 133, 136, 142, 145, 163, and 166.

<sup>95</sup> Meg Tuszynski and Richard Wagner, "From Mixed Economy to Entangled Political Economy: A Paretian Social-Theoretic Orientation," *Public Choice* 164, no. 2 (2015).



Developers in Tysons are paying extraordinarily high taxes for transportation improvements. Developers must pay \$3,261 per residential unit or \$18.12 per square foot in nonresidential buildings for transportation alone.<sup>96</sup> In addition to these fees, in 2013 the county board passed a new property tax in 2013 that covers land surrounding the four Silver Line Metro stations in the Tysons area as well as the land around Wiehle-Reston station, the last stop on the first phase of the Silver Line extension. The tax rate for these areas is 0.005 percent plus the standard Fairfax County property tax.<sup>97</sup> The average price of a residential unit in Tysons is \$510,000, so the transportation taxes combined with the Tysons-specific property tax amount to a little more than 1.1 percent for each new residential unit.<sup>98</sup>

Residential developers in Tysons are required to set aside 20 percent of new units as below-market-rate units.<sup>99</sup> The requirement is designed to facilitate residents of diverse incomes living in Tysons.<sup>100</sup> Nonresidential projects must pay either a one-time, \$3.00-per-square-foot tax to the Tysons Housing Trust Fund or an annual \$0.25-per-square-foot tax for 16 years. So far the fund has received \$5,222,283.<sup>101</sup>

While the task force members, including representatives of homeowner organizations, reached a consensus in the report they published, there has since been some opposition to redevelopment that is typical of Fischel's homevoter. In addition to Clark Tyler, other members

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<sup>96</sup> Fairfax County, "Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report," 21–23, and author's calculations.

<sup>97</sup> Fairfax County, "Tax Rates from the FY 2020 (Tax Year 2019) Adopted Budget," accessed April 17, 2020, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/taxes/real-estate/tax-rates>.

<sup>98</sup> Redfin, "Tysons Corner Housing Market," accessed March 28, 2020, <https://www.redfin.com/city/26538/VA/Tysons-Corner/housing-market>.

<sup>99</sup> Fairfax County, "Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan 2017 Edition," 34.

<sup>100</sup> In other research on the effects of inclusionary zoning programs across the Baltimore–Washington region, I find that these programs tax new housing construction. While they provide a large benefit to those households that get to live in the subsidized units, they may increase housing costs for the vast majority of Tysons and Fairfax County residents who do not, including those who earn less than the targets for the subsidized units. However, in the case of Tysons, set-asides for workforce housing likely have little effect on market outcomes since they are priced close to market-rate prices. See Emily Hamilton, "Inclusionary Zoning in the Baltimore–Washington Region" (Mercatus Working Paper, Mercatus Center at George Mason University, Arlington, VA, September 2019).

<sup>101</sup> Fairfax County, "Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report," 18.

of the McLean Citizens Association served on the task force, though none of them were official representatives of the association in their role on the task force. Following publication of the task force's report, some other members of the McLean Citizens Association have criticized the Comprehensive Plan and ongoing redevelopment in Tysons. They have argued that the Comprehensive Plan requires the county and developers to provide the infrastructure to accommodate growth before permitting new office and residential buildings out of concern that new buildings will increase traffic.

Protests to development in Tysons are notable for their focus on park space and support for policies designed to keep new Tysons residents from using public park space in other parts of the county. The McLean Citizens Association and the mayor of Vienna, Virginia, both gave testimony at planning commission meetings emphasizing their desire for full-size athletic fields to be built in the Tysons planning area.<sup>102</sup> So far, 3 fields out of the goal of 20 have been built, and developers have promised to build an additional 7.<sup>103</sup> The provision of the 10 fields that are currently legally promised will put the county halfway to its goal of 20 fields by 2050.

To appease these homeowners' concerns, the Tysons Park System Concept Plan relies on developers to provide 154 acres of new parks. For every 4.5 million square feet of new development, developers must provide one new athletic field or come to an agreement with the county or other developers to meet the requirement at another location in the county.<sup>104</sup> The plan depends on developers taking advantage of the large site plans they will be creating to provide

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<sup>102</sup> McLean Citizens Association, "Comments on Draft Tysons Implementation Plan Amendment, S13-II-TY1, Dated January 25, 2016," [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/comprehensive\\_plan/mca\\_comments\\_draft\\_tysons\\_impn\\_plan\\_final.pdf](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/comprehensive_plan/mca_comments_draft_tysons_impn_plan_final.pdf); Laurie A. DiRocco Mayor, Town of Vienna, "Proposed Tysons Implementation Plan Amendment," February 8, 2017, [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/comprehensive\\_plan/tovlettertofcpc\\_re-tysonsplanamend.pdf](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/comprehensive_plan/tovlettertofcpc_re-tysonsplanamend.pdf).

<sup>103</sup> Fairfax County, "Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report," 56.

<sup>104</sup> Fairfax County, "Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report," 36.

rights-of-way for utilities as well as space or facilities (or both) for public services such as schools and fire stations.<sup>105</sup>

The Comprehensive Plan also includes vague requirements for developers to provide small parks, and what actually gets built is a result of negotiations between developers and county planners on a project-by-project basis.<sup>106</sup> The plan calls for some small parks along with civic and art space to be provided near Metro stations, where dedicating land to parks or plazas may represent an opportunity cost of millions of dollars to the property owner.

The task force recommended that developers should be eligible to receive density bonuses exclusively for meeting LEED building standards and for contributing to the subsidized housing fund.<sup>107</sup> However, the final zoning ordinance allowed the county to offer up additional density in exchange for any community benefits:

For office uses: 2.5 FAR, exclusive of any bonus intensity obtained for proffered public facilities and/or public infrastructure, as set forth in the adopted comprehensive plan; however, an increase in FAR may be permitted by the Board.<sup>108</sup>

Real estate professionals on the task force signed on to all these requirements for developers to provide services that would otherwise be provided by local governments. The extensive fees that redevelopment in Tysons requires, along with the Tysons special property tax district, has met homevoters' demand that increased density in the area largely pay for its own infrastructure needs.<sup>109</sup>

The task force proved to be a mechanism for gaining support for redevelopment in Tysons from diverse interests. However, the consensus plan that they developed includes some

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<sup>105</sup> Fairfax County, "Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan 2017 Edition," 15.

<sup>106</sup> Fairfax County Park Authority, "Tysons Park System Concept Plan," 36.

<sup>107</sup> PB Placemaking for Tysons Task Force, "Transforming Tysons," 37.

<sup>108</sup> Fairfax County, "Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance" 6–62.

<sup>109</sup> Kali Schumitz, "Tysons Corner Tax District Draws Mixed Reviews," *Washington Post*, October 24, 2012.

contradictory objectives. Section 4 explores the internal inconsistencies in the Tysons redevelopment goals.

#### **4. Contradictions in the Tysons Redevelopment Plan**

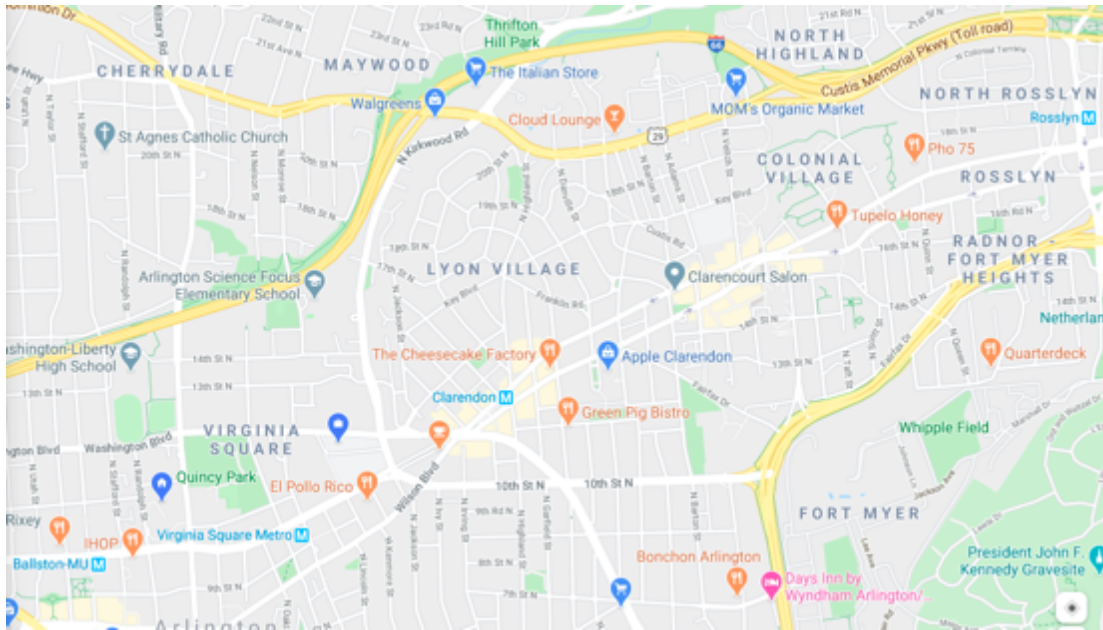
Before its Metro stations opened, Arlington had adapted to car transportation, with some wide arterial roads, surface parking lots, and a mall called Parkington.<sup>110</sup> The Arlington experience shows that it is possible for some neighborhoods to evolve from car dependency to TOD. TOD in Arlington has involved some traffic-calming measures,<sup>111</sup> but unlike Tysons, it has not involved the creation of a new street grid on top of a built-out area, and none of the streets adjacent to Arlington's Metro stations were ever as hostile to pedestrians as Route 123 and Route 7 in Tysons. Figures 4 and 5 show the difference in street density between Arlington and Fairfax at the same scale.

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<sup>110</sup> Arlington Historical Society, "A Parkington Christmas," November 24, 2017, <https://arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org/2017/11/a-parkington-christmas/>.

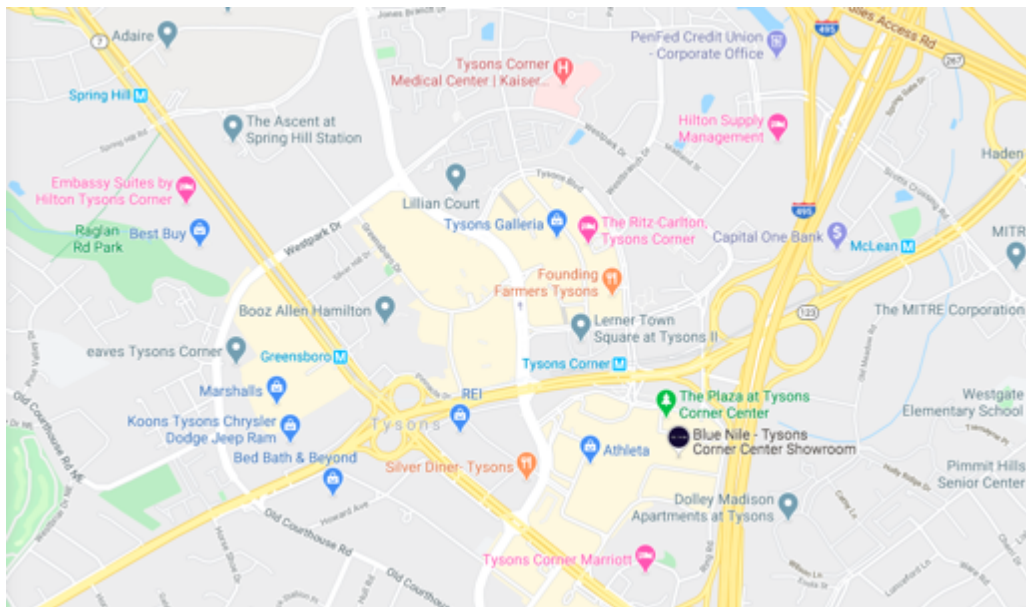
<sup>111</sup> Arlington County, "Neighborhood Complete Streets Background," accessed May 15, 2020, <https://projects.arlingtonva.us/programs/neighborhood-complete-streets/background/>.

**Figure 4. Arlington Street Grid**



Source: Google, “Map Data: Google,” 2020.

**Figure 5. Tysons Street Grid**



Source: Google, “Map Data: Google,” 2020.

In addition to Arlington having the benefit of a grid of streets, relative to highways and roads in Tysons, walkability in the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor benefits from underground Metro stations. In early 2007, the county board passed a motion for the Silver Line in Tysons to be built underground.<sup>112</sup> In 2007, Republican Gary H. Baise campaigned for the Fairfax County Board Chair on a platform of an underground Silver Line, but he lost to the Democratic incumbent Gerald E. Connolly.<sup>113</sup> Task force member Scott Monett also founded an organization called Tysons Tunnel that fought to have the line underground.<sup>114</sup> While local officials supported underground rail in Tysons, the FTA, Virginia Governor Tim Kaine, and Republican leaders in the Virginia statehouse supported aboveground rail because an underground line would have been much more expensive.<sup>115</sup> The more fiscally feasible aboveground plan won out, resulting in the Silver Line being built in the center of Route 123 and Route 7, with pedestrian-hostile elevated tracks and stations connected by long pedestrian bridges.<sup>116</sup>

The placement of Tysons's four Metro stops exacerbates challenges to developing walkability around the stations. In order to make the stations safely accessible, WMATA built massive skybridges, crossing highway-width roads and connecting the stations to both sides of the thoroughfares they cross. This station design is at odds with Fairfax County's Tysons Design Guidelines, which state,

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<sup>112</sup> Brian Trompeter, "Supervisors Press for Tunnel under Tysons," *Inside Nova*, January 9, 2007.

<sup>113</sup> Amy Gardner, "Baise Still Fighting Tysons Tunnel—for a Fee," *Washington Post*, December 3, 2007.

<sup>114</sup> Monett's professional work is unrelated to real estate or urban planning; he advocated for an underground Silver Line through Tunnel.org, a coalition of the McLean Chamber of Commerce. PB Placemaking for Tysons Task Force, "Transforming Tysons," appendix A, 6.

<sup>115</sup> William Flook, "FTA Rejects Underground Rail Route," *Washington Examiner*, June 1, 2007.

<sup>116</sup> Today, rail infrastructure, particularly tunneling, costs much more to build in the United States than in other developed countries. The Silver Line cost was more than double per mile what European countries spend on new above-ground rail lines. See Alon Levy, "Why It's So Expensive to Build Urban Rail in the U.S.," *City Lab*, January 26, 2018.

Above-grade skybridges or below-grade pedestrian tunnels are strongly discouraged as they detract from the vibrancy of the streetscape. Further, skybridges and tunnels can pose challenges for security and public access.<sup>117</sup>

The Metro station design demonstrates the challenge of creating a walkable urban environment on top of an edge city. It may be impossible to develop pleasant pedestrian environments while leaving intact the highways and arterial roads that run through Tysons. Given the challenging placement of the stations, WMATA planners arguably made the stations as safe and accessible as possible with skybridges. Figure 6 shows the Tysons McLean station on top of Route 123.

**Figure 6. McLean Metro Station**



Source: Google, “Google Maps,” accessed April 28, 2020.

As described in section 3, the Comprehensive Plan relies on developers assembling very large parcels in order to contribute to a new grid of narrow streets in their projects; however, such large-scale developments tend not to produce the type of fine-grained urban space that the

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<sup>117</sup> Fairfax County Office of Community Revitalization, “Tysons Urban Design Guidelines,” 33.

Comprehensive Plan calls for. As city planner Jeff Speck writes in his book *Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time*,

However delicate and lovely a building façade, there is little to entice a walker past five hundred feet of it. As urban theorist Jane Jacobs noted, “Almost nobody travels willingly from sameness to sameness and repetition to repetition, even if the physical effort required is trivial.” Getting the scale of the detail right is only half the battle; what matters even more is getting the scale of the buildings right, so that each block contains as many different buildings as reasonably possible. Only in this way will the pedestrian be rewarded with the continuously unfolding panorama that comes from many hands at work.<sup>118</sup>

The Tysons Design Guidelines include images depicting the type of development Jacobs promoted—narrow buildings with uneven lot lines (see figure 7). But by choosing to require development projects so large that it is feasible for them to include new streets and parks, the county planners closed off opportunities for the type of incremental urbanism that supports pedestrianism that they say they are trying to encourage.

In *Retrofitting Suburbia*, Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson discuss the challenges of replicating incremental urbanism in edge cities, which have been intentionally built to accommodate automobile traffic to the exclusion of pedestrians. Rather than Chicago, which is built with wide streets and around rail travel, they point to Santa Fe’s 17th-century-style walkable urbanism as the model to strive for. They argue,

The quality of place in Santa Fe is not a consequence of any single building. Rather, it is the result of the collective shaping of spatial and tactile experiences by multiple buildings in concert with the public realm. This kind of placemaking across multiple parcels necessitates public leadership and public-private partnerships—a return to exactly the kind of coordinated master planning, establishment of design codes, and infrastructure for

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<sup>118</sup> Jeff Speck, *Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time* (New York: North Point Press, 2012), 212.



walkability and interconnectivity that is anathema to the ad hoc, market-driven processes that gave rise to edge cities in the first place.<sup>119</sup>

**Figure 7. Michigan Avenue in Chicago, Illinois**



Note: The Tysons Design Guidelines include, as an example, Michigan Avenue in Chicago (shown here). However, Michigan Avenue was developed as small parcels, incrementally for different purposes over time. This variety in styles and materials is expensive and generally infeasible to create as part of a large redevelopment project that the Comprehensive Plan requires.

Source: Google, “Google Maps,” accessed April 28, 2020.

Parts of Santa Fe’s walkable urban core were of course centrally planned, including the Santa Fe Plaza, which was originally built as a fort, and the small grid of narrow streets around it. But the buildings that made Santa Fe an architectural landmark were not originally the result of design codes, public-private partnerships, or master planning. Rather, Santa Fe’s urban development was incremental, built in a variety of emergent architectural styles over time (see figure 8). That decentralized development that provides interest at the pedestrian scale will be difficult or impossible to create on 20-acre parcels in Tysons.

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<sup>119</sup> Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson, *Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs*, updated edition (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 177.

**Figure 8. Incremental Development in Santa Fe**



Source: Google, “Google Maps,” accessed April 28, 2020.

The Comprehensive Plan envisions developers providing 20 full-size athletic fields in the Tysons planning area. Such large expanses of greenspace that would be unused nearly all the time would create long, boring stretches in between destinations. These fields would be what Jacobs called “border vacuums,” obstacles created by boring, dead space that pedestrians are reluctant to cross on foot when they stand between the pedestrian and a potential destination.<sup>120</sup>

In mandating that developers provide parks and civic space, the Tysons Comprehensive Plan is following in the footsteps of New York City. In 1958 the Seagram Building opened, featuring a public plaza that quickly became a favorite spot for workers in Midtown to eat lunch or spend time outside. Based on the plaza’s success, the city began offering property owners density bonuses that allowed them to build larger buildings than they would otherwise be

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<sup>120</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), chap. 14.

permitted to build in exchange for “privately owned public space.”<sup>121</sup> However, because the new public spaces were built to meet the requirements for bonus density rather than to improve buildings’ value, they have not proved as appealing as the Seagram Building’s plaza.<sup>122</sup> Tysons may find that its privately owned public spaces, built to meet county requirements, are not well used by residents, workers, visitors, and shoppers.

Urban design that is comfortable for pedestrians creates a sense of enclosure, with buildings that are at least as tall as the width between building fronts across the street from each other.<sup>123</sup> The most walkable neighborhoods feature buildings that abut each other and the sidewalk. Zoning in Tysons allows this type of development for all types of development other than office, but its 2.5 FAR limit for offices means that office buildings will tend to have less walkable design.

Capital One Tower at the McLean Metro station demonstrates the type of office development that the plan encourages. The primary tower was approved for a height of 467 feet, in part because of its provision of rooftop park space and new street infrastructure. However, the street and sidewalk design maintains characteristics of a suburban office park, with landscaping between buildings and the public right-of-way wider than is warranted given the height of adjacent buildings.

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) determines road design standards in Fairfax County, and it continues to rely on road manuals that are not intended for walkable urban

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<sup>121</sup> Alain Bertaud, *Order without Design: How Markets Shape Cities* (Danbury, CT: Westchester Publishing Services, 2019), 322–31.

<sup>122</sup> Bertaud, *Order without Design*.

<sup>123</sup> Jeff Speck, *Walkable City*, 213–15.

areas and are instead intended to maximize speed and safety of drivers alone.<sup>124</sup> Figures 9 and 10 show the Capital One development.

**Figure 9. Buildings at Capital One Site**



Note: The Capital One development received bonus density for providing public infrastructure, proffers for public parks, and a public theater.

Source: Google, “Google Maps,” accessed April 28, 2020.

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<sup>124</sup> Tanya Snyder, “Transforming Tysons Corner: A High-Stakes Suburban Retrofit,” *Streetsblog USA*, October 27, 2011.

**Figure 10. Infrastructure at Capital One Site**



Note: Where the Capital One site meets the McLean station parking garage, the new street fails to meet the urban street grid standards that the Comprehensive Plan calls for.

Source: Google, “Google Maps,” accessed April 28, 2020.

With some exceptions, the goals of the competing interests that developed the task force plan and shaped the Comprehensive Plan have been reconciled by limiting growth to the areas closest to the Silver Line stations. This approach created both real estate profit opportunities and environmentally friendly development while minimizing the effects of change on surrounding single-family neighborhoods. The windfall to landowners as a result of both upzoning and the opening of the Silver Line was so great that the desired redevelopment has proved to be feasible even after requiring developers to pay for new infrastructure and public services. However, the greatest tension in the Tysons planning process and redevelopment is the goal of creating a walkable area while maintaining the current level of service that drivers traveling through the

area experience. The task force did not make specific recommendations for improving pedestrian access on the unsafe roads in Tysons, but it did support this objective:

The auto-oriented streets of Route 7 and Route 123 will be transformed to tree-lined boulevards designed to calm traffic through the most urban parts of Tysons while still moving traffic. People will be able to safely walk or bike along Route 7 and 123 to access nearby businesses. . . .

Route 7 could be designed to carry less traffic and be more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly, with more crossings, to create connectivity between Tysons 123 and Old Courthouse South.<sup>125</sup>

The Comprehensive Plan echoes these objectives nearly verbatim.<sup>126</sup> So far, however, little progress has been made toward these goals. In fact, work is underway to widen multiple sections of both Route 123 and Route 7.<sup>127</sup>

Walkability goals notwithstanding, the Comprehensive Plan supports the contradictory idea of widening streets to increase capacity for car travel while also tying wide, fast roads to the grid of streets and adding pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure to roads that are currently hostile to pedestrians.<sup>128</sup> The county has in fact made some improvements to some pedestrian infrastructure on both arterials, including new crosswalks, sidewalks, and pedestrian and cyclist routes that make it possible to cross highways.<sup>129</sup> However, making 10-lane roads like Route 123 and Route 7 safe and pleasant for pedestrians would require drastic changes, including slowing traffic with tools such as wider sidewalks, narrower traffic lanes, raised platform crosswalks, and wide medians, and eliminating several traffic lanes and turn lanes. Making it physically possible for people outside cars to cross 10-lane roads won't lead many people to do so.

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<sup>125</sup> PB Placemaking for Tysons Task Force, "Transforming Tysons," iv.

<sup>126</sup> Fairfax County, "Adopted Text for Plan Amendment 2007–23 (Tysons Corner Urban Center)," 9.

<sup>127</sup> Fairfax County, "Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report," 23.

<sup>128</sup> Fairfax County, "Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2017 Edition," 51.

<sup>129</sup> Fairfax County, "Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2017 Edition," 51.

In some cases, VDOT has stood in the way of Fairfax County improving pedestrian conditions near the Tysons area Metro stations. For example, county officials sought to add a crosswalk and remove a second right-turn lane at the intersection of Route 123 and Tysons Boulevard, near Tysons Corner station.<sup>130</sup> VDOT would not allow a crosswalk at an intersection with double right-turn lanes, nor would it allow the removal of one of the road's turn lanes because it would have increased delays for drivers.<sup>131</sup>

In Arlington, road rights-of-way are under local control, giving county officials the authority to design infrastructure to create relatively safe conditions for pedestrians near Metro stations. In contrast, thoroughfares in Tysons largely have state or federal rights-of-way, giving Fairfax County limited authority to facilitate conditions that are safe for pedestrians.

The Comprehensive Plan includes measures to implement transportation demand management (TDM) in Tysons. TDM is a set of tools used to discourage traffic congestion, either by discouraging car trips during peak travel times or encouraging people to use methods of transportation other than driving. The arrival of the Silver Line provided a major transportation alternative to driving. TDM tools also include making driving more expensive, either by intentionally slowing cars down or by implementing tolls. Neither of these options is being advanced in Tysons; as a consequence, the area's major thoroughfares will continue to be dangerous and unpleasant for pedestrians and cyclists.

Before Arlington's Orange Line was built, WMATA proposed to build a surface line along Interstate 66. Placing stations in this limited-access freeway would have been even more hostile to pedestrians and cyclists than the state routes in Tysons. Arlington planners fought for

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<sup>130</sup> David Alpert, "Why Is Tysons Walkability and Bikeability So Bad?," *Greater Greater Washington*, July 31, 2014.

<sup>131</sup> Alpert, "Why Is Tysons Walkability and Bikeability So Bad?"

underground Metro stations located along pedestrian-accessible boulevards (see figure 11), and unlike tunnel advocates in Tysons, they won.<sup>132</sup> Since Arlington’s Orange Line Metro stations were built, US rail construction costs have risen steeply, leading to what would have been a very high cost for underground rail in Tysons.<sup>133</sup> As a result, Tysons stations will never be the pedestrian-friendly sites that Arlington stations are (see figure 12).

**Figure 11. Ballston Metro Station Underground in Arlington**



Source: Google, “Google Maps,” accessed April 28, 2020.

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<sup>132</sup> Zachary Schrag, *The Great Society Subway: A History of the Washington Metro* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 55.

<sup>133</sup> The causes of high and rising infrastructure costs, particularly rail construction, are not well understood. For an overview of the issue, see Josh Barro, “Here’s Why We’ve Failed to Figure Out Why Infrastructure Costs So Much,” *New York Magazine*, July 24, 2019.



**Figure 12. Spring Hill Metro Station in Tysons**



Source: Google, “Google Maps,” accessed April 28, 2020.

Achieving walkability in Tysons is important not only as an independent goal, but also for achieving the Comprehensive Plan’s mode share goals. Without walkable neighborhoods on both ends of a transit trip, riders have an incentive to drive to their destinations rather than walk to and from transit stations that are located in unsafe or unpleasant neighborhoods.<sup>134</sup>

## **5. Measuring Progress toward the Tysons Redevelopment Objectives**

The Tysons Comprehensive Plan anticipates achieving its goals by 2050.<sup>135</sup> However, 10 years after the adoption of land use reforms is a reasonable point to evaluate progress so far.

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<sup>134</sup> Speck, *Walkable City*, 155.

<sup>135</sup> Fairfax County, “Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, 2017 Edition,” 19.

### ***Population Growth and Residential Development***

County policymakers established a goal of increasing the population in Tysons from just under 20,000 residents in 2010 to 100,000 by 2050 while also increasing employment in the area from about 100,000 to 200,000. Progress toward these two goals has been strong. The population has increased from 19,627 in 2010 to 23,236 as of 2017 census estimates.<sup>136</sup> In 2011, Tysons had 8,943 housing units.<sup>137</sup> As of August 2019, it has 12,991—with 952 units under construction, 24,514 approved, and 5,087 under review.<sup>138</sup> Not all the units approved or under review will be delivered, but counting only the units delivered or under construction so far, the number of housing units in Tysons has increased by 56 percent. If the units approved and under review were to be delivered by 2050 and no other housing units were to be built, the housing stock relative to the baseline would increase by 487 percent, putting it close to achieving the fivefold population growth that the county set as its objective.

Under the below-market-rate housing requirement, 752 units have been delivered (18.6 percent of total new units) that are affordable to residents making between 50 percent and 120 percent of the county’s median income. Because Fairfax is such a high-income county (the median household income is \$118,000 annually), many of the residents who qualify for income-restricted units are not low-income households, and units that are targeted to their income level may not require subsidy. For example, at the Lumen apartment building near the Greensboro

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<sup>136</sup> US Census Bureau, “Total Population, Universe: Total Population, 2013–2017,” American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

<sup>137</sup> Fairfax County Planning Commission, “Report to the Board of Supervisors on Tysons Corner,” October 2011, [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/annual\\_reports/2011\\_annual\\_report.pdf](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/tysons/sites/tysons/files/assets/documents/pdf/annual_reports/2011_annual_report.pdf).

<sup>138</sup> Fairfax County, “Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report,” 16.

station, market-rate two-bedroom apartments are available for as little as \$2,419 per month.<sup>139</sup> Some income-restricted two-bedroom units are available for \$2,527.<sup>140</sup>

Most new housing units in Tysons are in high-rise apartment buildings. These buildings have largely replaced old office buildings, parking lots, or low-density commercial buildings like car dealerships and big-box stores. The average one-bedroom apartment in Tysons rents for \$2,388 compared with \$1,930 for Fairfax County as a whole.<sup>141</sup> However, over the past year, rent in Tysons has increased by 4 percent relative to 6 percent in the county as a whole.<sup>142</sup> Some evidence indicates that apartments in Tysons are becoming more affordable over time as new supply is delivered. For example, the lowest-priced apartments at The Ascent, one of the earliest Tysons redevelopment projects near the Spring Hill Metro station, rented for \$1,753 per month in 2018.<sup>143</sup> Today, some studios at The Ascent rent for \$1,674 per month.<sup>144</sup>

### ***Office Development***

The jobs-to-residents ratio has fallen from 11.7:1 in 2010 to 6.8:1 in 2019—which is 42 percent of the way to the county’s goal of 2:1.<sup>145</sup> While the ratio of jobs to residents in Tysons is shrinking as planned, office development is proceeding according to the Comprehensive Plan goals. About 2.7 million square feet of office space have been delivered in Tysons since 2010, and nearly one million square feet are under construction.<sup>146</sup> The average office worker

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<sup>139</sup> Apartments.com, “Lumen,” accessed February 17, 2020, <https://www.apartments.com/lumen-tysons-va/kswv318/>.

<sup>140</sup> Lumen, “Workforce Dwelling Unit Program,” accessed February 17, 2020, <https://lumentysons.com/wdu/>.

<sup>141</sup> Rent Café, “Tysons Corner, VA: Rental Market Trends,” accessed March 28, 2020, <https://www.rentcafe.com/average-rent-market-trends/us/va/tysons-corner/>.

<sup>142</sup> Rent Café, “Tysons Corner, VA.”

<sup>143</sup> Vernon Miles, “Want to Live in Tysons? Here Are the Current and Future Options,” *Tysons Reporter*, October 15, 2018.

<sup>144</sup> Apartments.com, “The Ascent at Spring Hill Station,” accessed March 28, 2020, <https://www.apartments.com/the-ascent-at-spring-hill-station-mclean-va/kgr8yf9/>.

<sup>145</sup> Fairfax County, “Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report,” 10.

<sup>146</sup> Fairfax County, “Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report,” 14.

in Tysons has about 300 square feet.<sup>147</sup> The new office construction therefore represents about 12,000 new jobs in Tysons.

### ***Silver Line Ridership***

So far, Silver Line ridership has been below the numbers projected in its funding applications, as is common across rail projects.<sup>148</sup> In 2004, the FTA estimated that the five new Silver Line stations would attract 24,600 weekday passengers in the first year of service, which was projected to occur in 2011.<sup>149</sup> The first phase of the Silver Line, including the McLean, Tysons, Greensboro, Spring Hill, and Wiehle-Reston stations, actually opened in 2014. Ridership in 2015, the first full year of service, was an average of 14,950 weekday passengers. In 2019, the five stations saw 16,940 weekday passengers on average.<sup>150</sup>

Ridership rates below forecast may in part be the result of declining ridership on the system as a whole. Outside the Silver Line, WMATA's weekday Metrorail ridership declined from 660,130 in 2015 to 615,350 in 2019.<sup>151</sup> However, some of the Silver Line stations' riders switched from the Orange Line stations west of East Falls Church to the Silver Line stations that are now more convenient for them. These Orange Line stations saw greater ridership losses than the system as a whole, down 11.4 percent compared with 2.3 percent for all stations excluding the new Silver Line stations.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Fairfax County, "Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report," 17, and author's calculations.

<sup>148</sup> Bent Flyvbjerg, "How Common and How Large Are Cost Overruns in Transport Infrastructure Projects?," *Transport Reviews* 23, no. 1 (2010).

<sup>149</sup> Federal Transit Administration, "Transportation Effects," chap. 6 in *Final Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(F) Evaluation*, December 2004, 9.

<sup>150</sup> Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, "Rail Ridership Data Viewer," accessed February 9, 2020, <https://www.wmata.com/initiatives/ridership-portal/Rail-Data-Portal.cfm#main-content>.

<sup>151</sup> Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, "Rail Ridership Data Viewer."

<sup>152</sup> Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, "Rail Ridership Data Viewer."

An unpublished Metro analysis that was reported in the press blames the low Silver Line ridership in part on poor pedestrian and bike infrastructure surrounding the stations.<sup>153</sup> While this is a valid barrier to ridership, the FTA estimates did not assume that Fairfax County would make any new pedestrian or cyclist infrastructure investments near the stations or allow more residences and offices to be built relative to what 2004 zoning permitted.<sup>154</sup> Additionally, aboveground Silver Line stations that span arterial roads reduce ridership demand relative to a more pedestrian-friendly design. Following the Arlington model of underground stations on more pedestrian-friendly streets would have reduced the challenge of creating a pedestrian- and bike-friendly environment around the stations.

### ***Walkability***

Private contributions to the grid of streets are in place or underway in several locations. About one mile of streets is now complete out of the stated goal of about 20 miles.<sup>155</sup> The first section of street grid developed in Tysons is adjacent to an apartment building called The Ascent, near the Spring Hill Metro. The project includes one block length of one street, called Broad Street. So far Broad Street at The Ascent does little to improve walkability because it does not connect to other pedestrian-friendly streets, but Broad Street resumes in another development, called The Boro, one-quarter mile away. Fairfax County has purchased a vacant retail property located adjacent to The Ascent, with plans to build a street that will connect the sections of

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<sup>153</sup> Martin Di Caro, “Silver Line Ridership in Tysons Well Below Metro Estimates,” *WAMU* 88.5, August 3, 2015.

<sup>154</sup> Federal Transit Administration, “Transportation Effects,” 38.

<sup>155</sup> The Comprehensive Plan includes a conceptual map of Tysons with a grid of local and service streets. This map includes about 240 blocks. Based on a standard urban block being one-twelfth of a mile, the map portrays Tysons as having about 20 miles of small streets. See Fairfax County, “Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan 2017 Edition.”

Broad Street.<sup>156</sup> So far the county has allocated \$18.1 million for the grid of streets, including the purchase of land and construction costs for one small stretch of street and funds to study the extension of another.<sup>157</sup>

The Boro project, located about one-third mile north of the Greensboro Metro station, includes the most well-developed street grid so far. The project will have multiple phases of construction, with the first consisting of three residential towers and an office building along with ground-floor retail. The project includes the construction of two new streets, in addition to the Broad Street connection, each two blocks long. The streets are narrow and in a grid pattern with no setback between the buildings and the public right-of-way. A portion of the new grid is car free with no sidewalks. Figure 13 shows a new narrow street between buildings at The Boro.

While new developments are showing the potential for small walkable places in Tysons, little progress has been made toward making it possible for pedestrians to safely and pleasantly navigate between portions of the developing street grid. The Plaza at Tysons Corner Center shows that in places, only islands of walkability are feasible to build, given the elevated Metro stations and pedestrian-hostile roads that surround them. Tysons Corner Center built The Plaza, an elevated park, to connect the Tysons Corner Metro station to the mall (see figure 14). Three new buildings surround The Plaza—a 431-unit apartment building called Vita, an office tower, and a hotel. Although pedestrians can access these buildings using the station’s pedestrian bridge, walking to them from anywhere other than the mall would require either traversing the mall’s maze of parking garage access roads or crossing hazardous Chain Bridge Road. From the east, the area is entirely inaccessible on foot because of Interstate 495.

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<sup>156</sup> Loria, “Tysons Parcel Primed for Redevelopment Commands \$60.2M”; Sernovitz, “Fairfax County Acquires Former Tysons Container Store.”

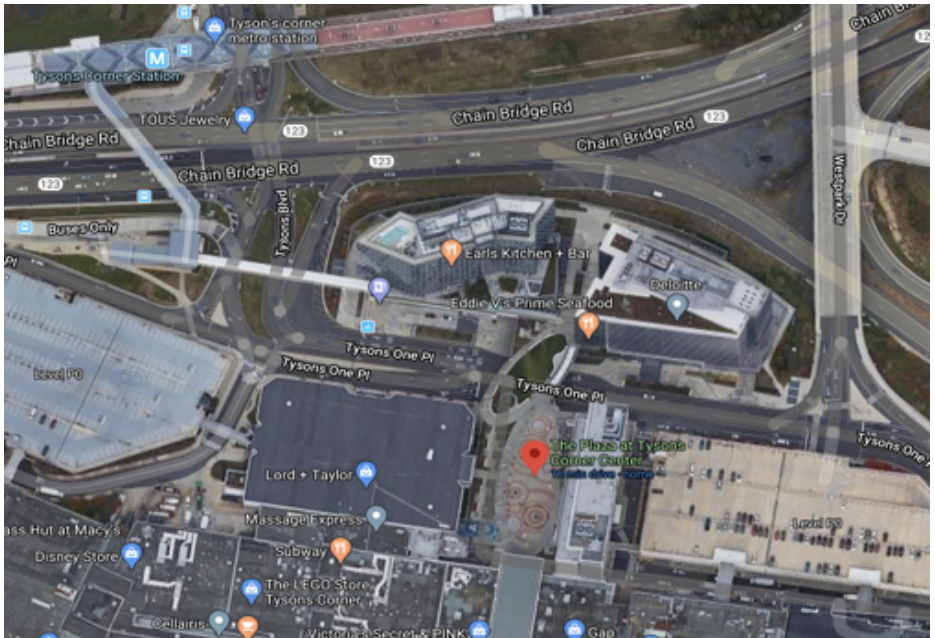
<sup>157</sup> Catherine Douglas Moran, “County Board OKs \$51 Million for Tysons-Area Road Work, New Streets,” *Tysons Reporter*, June 4, 2019.

**Figure 13. Buildings and Streets at The Boro**



Source: Google, "Google Maps," accessed April 28, 2020.

**Figure 14. The Plaza at Tysons Corner Center**



Note: The Plaza at Tysons Corner Center connects the mall at the south side of Route 123 to the Tysons Corner Metro station at the north side. The Plaza makes it possible to walk from the mall to the station through a series of pedestrian bridges.

Source: Google, Maxar Technologies, accessed April 28, 2020.

Rental rates in Tysons show that consumers are willing to pay high prices to live there in spite of the limitations on walkability. Small one-bedroom apartments in The Boro are available for about \$2,100 per month,<sup>158</sup> and they are available for about \$1,700 at Vita.<sup>159</sup> These prices are comparable with new-construction buildings in Arlington. In Ballston, for example, a small one-bedroom at The Origin, a new apartment building near the Metro station, is available for about \$2,000.<sup>160</sup>

### ***Transportation Mode Share***

What remains to be seen is if small areas of walkability in Tysons can lead to the major shifts in transportation mode share the redevelopment plan calls for. Since 2011, the county has been tracking morning and evening single-occupancy vehicle (SOV) commutes into and out of Tysons. Since 2011, total morning and evening trips have increased by about 1.9 percent.<sup>161</sup> However, since 2017, SOV trips have been falling.<sup>162</sup> And as a share of total trips into and out of Tysons, SOV trips have fallen by 12.6 percent as all other mode shares have increased.<sup>163</sup>

To complement the new Metro stations, the Tysons plan calls for circulator buses to expand the locations that are accessible by transit.<sup>164</sup> Initially, county transportation planners envisioned four circulator routes, but they began operation with just three routes, one of which

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<sup>158</sup> The Boro Tysons, “Floor Plans,” accessed March 28, 2020, <https://www.boldenrise.com/floor-plans>. Price is for a 650-square-foot one-bedroom apartment.

<sup>159</sup> Vita Tysons Corner Center, “Floor Plans,” accessed March 28, 2020, <https://www.vitatyson.com/floor-plans/?bedrooms=1&floor=&min=&max=&availability=>. Price is for a 542-square-foot one-bedroom apartment.

<sup>160</sup> Origin Ballston, “Availabilities,” accessed March 28, 2020, <https://originballston.com/availability/>. Price is for a 525-square-foot one-bedroom apartment.

<sup>161</sup> Fairfax County, “Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report,” 27.

<sup>162</sup> Fairfax County, “Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report,” 27.

<sup>163</sup> Fairfax County, “Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report,” 27.

<sup>164</sup> Fairfax County, “Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan 2017 Edition,” 9.



covered destinations previously covered by two other bus routes.<sup>165</sup> All three routes stop at Tysons Corner station.

Some riders have complained that taking the Tysons circulators can be slower than walking between destinations because of the buses' meandering routes and long headways.<sup>166</sup> As of 2016, the most recent year for which ridership for Fairfax County buses is broken down by route, two of the circulator routes were among the lowest 20 percent of riders per revenue mile in the county.<sup>167</sup> The third, however, was in the top 20 percent.<sup>168</sup> The routes offer a discounted fare of \$0.50 per ride compared with \$2.00 for other routes in Fairfax County.<sup>169</sup> All three routes had a farebox recovery ratio of less than 10 percent.<sup>170</sup> The average farebox recovery ratio in the county is 18 percent.<sup>171</sup>

In 2014, Fairfax County adopted a Bicycle Master Plan, including a conceptual map for bike infrastructure, depicting about 17 miles of bike lanes in Tysons.<sup>172</sup> So far, 7.7 miles of bike infrastructure have been created in Tysons, but this figure includes shared-use markings (sharrows) in addition to painted bike lanes and protected bike lanes.<sup>173</sup> Along Route 7, the road that runs along the Greensboro and Spring Hill metro stops, a shared pedestrian and bike path has been added in both directions as part of widening the road.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Tysons Partnership, "Public Transportation," accessed February 12, 2020, <https://www.tysonspartnership.org/transportation/public-transportation/>.

<sup>166</sup> Jenifer Joy Madden and Navid Roshan, "New Tysons Circulator Bus Routes Get Mixed Reviews," *Greater Washington*, September 10, 2014.

<sup>167</sup> Fairfax County Department of Transportation, "Transit Development Plan Fiscal Year 2016–Fiscal Year 2022," March 2016, table 3-2, <http://www.drpt.virginia.gov/media/1907/fairfax-county-tdp-2016.pdf>.

<sup>168</sup> Fairfax County Department of Transportation, "Transit Development Plan," table 3-2.

<sup>169</sup> Fairfax County Department of Transportation, "Transit Development Plan," table 1-4.

<sup>170</sup> Fairfax County Department of Transportation, "Transit Development Plan," table 3-3.

<sup>171</sup> Fairfax County Department of Transportation, "Transit Development Plan," table 3-3.

<sup>172</sup> Fairfax County Department of Transportation, "Fairfax County Bicycle Master Plan."

<sup>173</sup> Fairfax County, "Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report," 35.

<sup>174</sup> Fairfax County, "Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report," 23.

As in its land use planning, the Tysons Bicycle Master Plan cites Arlington County as a model of cycling safety and education,<sup>175</sup> even though fewer than 2 percent of Arlingtonians commute to work by bicycle.<sup>176</sup> Unlike Tysons, Arlington’s TOD is not bisected by hazards to cyclists like arterial roads and interstate highways.<sup>177</sup> The Bicycle Master Plan identifies dozens of sites where bicycle infrastructure needs to be improved in order to provide safe routes to and within Tysons.<sup>178</sup> In 2019, fewer than one percent of trips in and out of Tysons were made on foot or by bike.<sup>179</sup>

In general, more progress has been made toward the land use goals for Tysons than the transportation goals. Even though new development in Tysons requires large contributions to infrastructure and public services, the upzoning has made substantial new investments in multifamily and office developments worthwhile. Tysons has not yet shown that it is possible to turn an edge city into a place where a substantial number of people choose to get around by means other than driving. Whether or not Fairfax County policymakers and developers succeed at achieving the walkability goals established for Tysons, the plan has proved to be a politically feasible way to allow more housing construction in a high-opportunity county, in locations close to jobs and transit.

## **6. Policy Lessons from Tysons**

In addition to the Silver Line Metro expansion, a key motivating factor for redevelopment planning in Tysons was that prices—and tax revenues—for office space were declining relative

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<sup>175</sup> Fairfax County Department of Transportation, “Fairfax County Bicycle Master Plan.”

<sup>176</sup> US Census Bureau, “Sex of Workers by Means of Transportation to Work, Universe: Workers 16 Years and Over, Arlington County, 2013–2017,” American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

<sup>177</sup> Fairfax County Department of Transportation, “Fairfax County Bicycle Master Plan,” 3–2.

<sup>178</sup> Fairfax County Department of Transportation, “Fairfax County Bicycle Master Plan,” appendix I.

<sup>179</sup> Fairfax County, “Tysons 2018–2019 Progress Report,” 182.

to offices in more walkable and transit-accessible neighborhoods in the region. The potential to increase the county's tax base (and avoid property tax rate increases for current homeowners) helped representatives of neighborhood organizations on the task force to endorse the redevelopment objectives.

Other edge cities are now facing long-run fiscal challenges similar to what Tysons policymakers and residents foresaw. Suburban office parks across the country are experiencing vacancy rates double that of their respective regions, which will ultimately lead to lower property tax revenues for their jurisdictions.<sup>180</sup> In suburban jurisdictions that shun new housing construction, one day this fiscal threat may reduce homeowners' opposition to new development that can help maintain their current level of government services without increasing property tax rates.

The task force appointed at the beginning of the redevelopment planning process provided a platform for stakeholders with all sorts of objectives to have their interests represented in the ultimate plan. The task force members worked to create a redevelopment plan and guidelines for growth; their purpose was not to determine whether or not growth would be permitted. This approach provides one model for overcoming typical impediments to new multifamily housing in high-income suburban localities.

While the Tysons experience shows that it is possible to overcome anti-development coalitions with pro-development interests, it has not yet shown that it is feasible to turn an edge city environment into a walkable neighborhood. Rather than taking space away from cars and making infrastructure choices that slow traffic down to make the area safe for pedestrians, redevelopment in Tysons has been paired with maintaining and even increasing the amount of

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<sup>180</sup> Newmark Grubb Knight Frank, "Suburban Office Obsolescence," 5.

real estate dedicated to major car thoroughfares. Christopher Leinberger, a real estate researcher and practitioner, said this of the effort:

The redevelopment of Tysons is the most important urban redevelopment in the country, possibly in the world. If they do this right, it'll be the model. Just as it was the model of edge cities, it will be the model of the urbanization of the suburbs. It's that big.<sup>181</sup>

In seeking to please all interest groups—those who supported athletic fields and walkability and those who wanted to maintain car travel speeds on Tysons's highways and arterials while making these routes safe for pedestrians—some of the plan's objectives may prove mutually exclusive.

The Tysons experience shows that in growing, high-cost regions, zoning reform that allows for increased density can result in rapid development and corresponding higher tax revenues, even when developers are required to provide substantial proffers that may reduce homeowner opposition to development. Tysons shows one route for overcoming suburban anti-development tendencies. The new housing that has been built and that is in process under the plan will provide the opportunity for tens of thousands of new residents to live in a high-opportunity location.

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<sup>181</sup> Mullins, "The Audacious Plan to Turn a Sprawling DC Suburb into a Big City."