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Chamber Becomes Cheerleader

Fairfax Tomorrow to advocate for transit-oriented development.

By Ari Cetron
August 2, 2006

Monday, Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce unveiled a new program called "Fairfax Tomorrow" designed to support "transit-oriented development" across the county.

"We think Fairfax Tomorrow is going to help that future growth by focusing that growth around mass transit," said Dale Peck, director of the chamber.

As part of the initiative, the chamber released parts of a survey which showed broad support for transit-oriented development, with 56 percent of those surveyed indicating support.

Fairfax County lacks a formal definition for transit oriented development, and the Planning Commission is currently engaged in a community dialogue to define transit oriented development and what it will mean for Fairfax.

Chamber President Bill Lecos said that it is possible to ask people if they support something which has not yet been defined. Area residents — 1,800 were surveyed — intuitively know the difference between different sorts of development, he said. "The residents of Fairfax County clearly understand the difference between Springfield today and Clarendon today," Lecos said. "This is the conversation that is occurring across the fence."

Lecos did not make the entire survey available and said the chamber would release it a little at a time.

The chamber plans to advocate for the development anywhere it can, said Lecos.

Transit-oriented development, in broad terms, means clustering development around existing transit stations while preserving existing neighborhoods and open space. Chamber representatives might attend homeowner's association meetings, send letters, or advocate in more professional settings. "The secret to the success of this outreach is the multitude of voices," Lecos said.

The Fairfax County Federation of Citizen's Associations is supportive of the chamber's efforts, said Jeff Parnes, vice-president of the federation. "There is general recognition that future communities should have mixed-use components," Parnes said.

The survey also showed that 67 percent of people believe that Fairfax is growing too quickly, but 57 percent believe that growth is inevitable.

Meanwhile ...

Members of the Fairfax County Planning Commission heard from two speakers last week as part of the commission's effort to define transit-oriented development.

Much of the presentations of both speakers focused on similar themes that have been emerging in past meetings. Transit-oriented development should cluster the development near the transit station. It should also encourage walking, restrict parking and be developed at a scale which favors people over cars.

The development should have a mix of uses, but each one does not necessarily have to be the same. "Not every transit station has to have residential, retail and office at it," said Mariia Zimmerman of the center for transit-oriented development.

Another component should be community involvement, said Nat Bottigheimer of Metro. Bottigheimer had worked with the Maryland Department of Transportation in designing the area around the West Hyattsville metro station. Bottigheimer stressed the importance of involving the community early in the project, and working with them to develop alternatives and determine what level of development they would accept.



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