

Area 2 LHA PC/CAC & PLH WG Meeting

Lee Highway Alliance Planning/Community Advisory Committees and PLH Working Group Meeting

(4/22/21, 7 PM – 9:30 PM)

Panel comments by topic:

Land Use

Pamela G. – How can we create a pedestrian activated Main Street when all signs indicate retail square footage is shrinking?

County Response: Lee Highway is a sought-after neighborhood-serving commercial destination. Certain elements may shrink. There are opportunities for other engaging experiences, like light industrial uses, that can help animate the street in addition to traditional restaurants/retail. Northern portion of County doesn't have access to those uses. There will be many ways for ground floors (including residential) to interact well with the streetscape.

Mike C. – What impact would the Plan have on the businesses and residents near the Lee Hwy./N. George Mason Dr. node?

County Response: Add new residents. More neighborhood for those businesses to serve. Both scenarios imagine mixed use at intersection would be built to accept a mix of uses. There are always opportunities for a business and property owner to work something out that will allow businesses to come back into the new space.

Tom W. – What do the scenarios explore for the Lee Community Center and Langston Brown – what is the building height and what type of land uses are proposed?

County Response: Need to continue to provide public services/amenities and it would need to stay public land, as there is very little public land in the County. No plans/specific proposals yet for those sites. Scenario A up to 5 stories and Scenario B up to 7 stories.

Sandra G. - What do you mean by programs? Would it include FS8?

County Response: Public service uses (recreation, education). Reevaluation of what is there and what else could be there (additions). FS8 a lot has been determined there with recent process to design it. No reconsideration of that but there are

single family lots that could help facilitate transition and connection. Like the idea of those public facilities being a part of social hubs that also include public space and nearby commercial destinations to become important nodes w/in community.

Sandra G. - Whatever you do, need to address intersection at Heidelberg. It is treacherous and nothing needs to be added to make that more congested.

County Response: Example of place where having additional street grid north of Lee Highway, that can allow people to move between Culpepper and Cameron without having to go to that intersection, will take pressure off that intersection.

Wilma J. - Want to know what different types of housing will be allowed for Halls Hill neighborhood but also want to contrast it with idea of getting commercial property owners incented to increase height by obtaining the single family houses behind them. How will it benefit Halls Hill?

County Response: Consolidation idea of housing is not to provide more commercial or only commercial. It could result in mixed use and more residential.

Wilma J. - Will that be required? You are talking about affordable housing and bringing more people but if that (affordable housing) is not required then that is a concern.

County Response: Having larger footprints increases ability to increase affordable housing. Your comment will be taken into consideration. Scenario A shows single family lots changing here and there, a little bit at a time. Scenario B. shows low-scale multifamily along residential edge. With larger consolidation there are opportunities for more public space and greater flexibility to create social hubs and reinforce business district that has been there in the past and could be there in future.

Bill B. – Lee Center end of useful life. At 7-11 we lost opportunity to influence what could go there. House behind bank was for sale and now 2 houses for sale. Need to look at changes happening now. How can we work to not only plan, but take action to implement some of these ideas at the moment?

County Response: Giving private sector a reason to work with County by giving them incentives to build what is desired by community. Want to avoid by-right development that doesn't result in the kind of transformation that bold vision seeks to create.

Ginger B. – LHA guiding principles advocates for a range of housing for people of various income levels. Can you talk about some of the ways that we can diversify our housing choices and achieve our housing goals?

County Response: There are many housing types that are not currently available or with enough supply along corridor, so by allowing and incentivizing m-family and mixed use it increases supply which is good for affordability. With those projects there is greater capacity to set a portion of those units aside at different price points., particularly in Scenario B. For affordable housing developers, it means they can build more affordable units. If a single family home is converted to a two-family home or small m-family building, that are similar in scale, it can provide more opportunities to increase housing supply. To meet the goals, we will probably need a little bit of all those ideas and not rely on a single method. We will also be looking at the regulations to make sure we can promote those types of housing.

Transportation and Connectivity

Richard P. – What kind of new bus system will be required to reduce automobile vehicular trips resulting from increased density?

County Response: goal is multi-modal. Now people are getting in cars for short and long trips. If we make it more walkable, the short trips will be possible by foot and bikes (1/4 mile). Bus system will need to be more attractive than other options – waiting environment to get bus needs to be much nicer. Bus needs to come more often (every 15 min) and be predictable. Need to make moving east-west and north-south, to get to RB corridor, as smoothly as possible during congested times. Buses need to be more frequent, more comfortable and mode of choice at congested times.

Richard P. – How will a redesigned street be an improvement and how will it protect walkers and bicyclists?

County Response: Need to work w/private sector to borrow space so we can have a protected bike lane. Need separation to encourage people of all abilities to use bike lane, including electric scooters and other types of personal electric vehicles. People want to see a separation of these from pedestrians to avoid conflicts. Street trees are the most desired and need to be incorporated.

Tom K. - Continuous tree canopy on Lee Hwy. is a big thing to ask for and hard to deliver. Median islands (20') can provide tree canopies - not advocating for this. Raise medians with proper drainage. Street trees on both sides can cover 40' comfortably. Trees on buildings is good – we are getting good at that - works best on street in public realm. 40 feet is not a lot to ask for. May be something to do at nodes for a park like entrance and useable space.

County Response: Proposed street sections all provide much more space for tree canopy than there is today. This is one of the reasons why we will need to borrow space in the narrowest portion of Lee Hwy.

Carrie – concerned with back streets you want to create (25th street to Safeway) cutting through front porch streets where kids are playing now. moving cars off Lee Hwy to cut through these streets. How will these roads be built, through eminent domain?

County Response: Streets would be narrow and calmed. Not intended to be high-speed and need to design them that way. We want to create more opportunities for those families to walk or bike to the Safeway without having to go out to Lee Hwy. Intersections can be designed so it's not a cut-through for people who want to go a long distance. An example is in Lyon Village, where the parallel network was improved to create calmer streets and yet they provide alternate routes without having to go onto Wilson. Not through eminent domain. Properties would need to be bought by a developer and consolidated. The streets would get built through the redevelopment. Exact location/configuration is going to be subject to how the land is assembled.

Public Space and Stormwater

John F. – What do the scenarios explore to improve stormwater management and result in less flooding in Tara Leeway? Two of the main flooding issues are not in area 2 but rather at Sycamore and Lee Hwy. and down at Spout Run. Are you actively engaged w/DES already to integrate their plan and vision for stormwater?

County Response: Yes, numerous discussions with DES and crunching numbers to identify where in stormwater network we need to make improvements. This will help us figure out, along Lee Hwy., what we can do to make their job easier downstream. For example, finding the right locations to intercept that water at the top of the watershed and detain it. In other cases, creating more permeable surfaces or reducing impervious surfaces. Worked with DES to identify those locations and that's what the stars on the maps are showing.

Tad L. – Open space choices don't make sense from a development standpoint. Don't see them ever happening. Don't know how you arrived at those locations. Some of those spaces are so long and narrow and don't know what the benefit is. I know none of the spaces in Scenario B are going to happen. Developers have gotten into trouble during the rezoning process because they were shown on a plan and people expect them. Not saying these sites can't have them but identifying them on a place where they don't practically work is a mistake.

County Response: There will be flexibility with the location. Open spaces are shown as part of redevelopment of the broader sites, not at exact locations. The narrower spaces are meant to be more connective, to get people to Lee Hwy., not necessarily a public space for gathering. General locations for open spaces were identified based on spacing and proximity to adjoining redevelopment opportunities. Details are up to refinement.

Building Heights

Chris F. – To the panel, do you support allowing additional height in this area to spur additional community improvements? To the County, can you speak about the connection between additional height and those community benefits?

County Response: going up to 5 stories (from 3 and 4 allowed today) provides some flexibility for redevelopment to happen, opportunities for a better environment along Lee Hwy. and some contributions to the undergrounding of utilities. However, there is going to be a limit to how much public benefit those moderately scale projects can deliver. If we go up to 7 stories, there are more opportunities for public benefits. In both cases, you are building the same building, with the same number of elevators and support services. Of course, in the 7 story building you have to add more parking, however, you are also adding more revenue by adding those extra floors. That means there is greater financial ability to provide more public benefits as well (all in the context of doing height well architecturally, with transitions, facades etc.) There are more economies of scale with taller buildings and greater footprints. It helps to pay for consolidation, which in turn makes public benefits easier to achieve.

Sandi C. – Land use and density are part of the vision to make Lee Hwy. greener. 15-min. compact villages of mixed uses, where residents can bike or walk to most services, would facilitate convenience and can achieve some of the benefits that we need. The 5-7 mid-rise are in accord with the LHA's low-medium density guiding principles. It's a sweet spot for urban design and producing welcoming, human scale, buildings. A sweet spot for developers in terms of construction cost and financing, because stick build construction is less expensive than concrete and steel and sometimes more profitable than taller buildings (i.e. Westmoreland Street in EFC, Logan Circle in DC, Bethesda's downtown, Old Town waterfront and Mosaic district, etc.).

Community Improvement and Benefit Priorities

Paul H. – What kind of community improvements and/or benefits should the communities request, to meet the impacts associated with growth, and how do we best prioritize those in the plan moving forward? In other words, what are the community improvements or benefits that should be requested and what is the best strategy in the plan to prioritize those across the different areas? It will be important to have a CIP strategy that doesn't just rely on additional density to achieve the goals the community wants to achieve.

County Response: we already have an early indication of what the aspirations are in each of the areas (for example heard from Sandra today about the improvement to the intersection). We are clear where certain improvements need to be made. This is a starting point. We will need to have more conversations with the community to have a better understanding of what things they think have a higher priority. Will ask the community to prioritize the 7 objectives, in the Bold Vision, for the entire corridor and in their neighborhood. Once we have a good understanding of the priorities, we will be able to prioritize those in the plan. For example, if in area 2 making Lee highway more walkable is a top priority, then we will be asking the developer to provide more setbacks, better landscaping and undergrounding of utilities. We will have to look more closely at the plan to see if the incentives that we are offering will encourage that. We will also be looking at what uses should be allowed and what improvements should be done by the public sector, that would need to be included in the CIP.

Bill B. - Are we being too conservative in our planning for the next 30 years? Feels like high-rises and density are marching up Lee Hwy. Will it catch up with us before the next 30 years?

County Response: There are many different neighborhoods along the corridor. In N. Highlands the scenarios propose greater intensity and density than in area 2, because of its proximity to rail, connectivity to the highway, etc. There are many reasons that area can accept greater height and density and do it well. In area 2, we are being bold, however, it wouldn't make much sense to go higher than 7 stories. The scenarios contemplate a front porch approach in area 2. It's a big transformation to go from what is auto-oriented and highway-oriented to something as walkable as Westmoreland St. It would be a dramatic transformation and will take 30 years, with the incremental change that is likely to happen there.

Schools

Mike C. - Concerned about the number of residents that would be coming to this area and the impact to schools. Has there been any consideration to making the Lee Center a school and are you coordinating with APS?

County Response: Yes, County is working with APS. Next step is to test the enrollment implication based on population scenarios, the kinds of school settings (and seats) that would be needed and how to meet those needs. We haven't made a specific recommendation for what can happen at the Lee Center yet, however, a school site has not been ruled out.

Carrie – what is the timeline for the scenarios? In the next 2 years there are excess seats in NW part of corridor. Sounds like APS wants to make one of the NW schools an option school and take it out of the neighborhood system.

County Response: In the summer we will meet with APS. They will have the benefit of our analysis for their planning and we will have the benefit of their feedback to shape the plan for Lee Hwy.