

Eisenhower Partnership Comments on the Eisenhower West Plan Draft Released September 2015

The Eisenhower Partnership has appreciated the opportunity to be part of the Eisenhower West Planning process and to have a representative on the Steering Committee.

Further we are deeply thankful to the City staff for their willingness to adjust the work plan and work products in response to comments from the public and the Steering Committee. The current plan document is a thoughtful response to the priorities of many individuals and organizations.

The Eisenhower Partnership entered the planning process with these key objectives:

- Recognize Eisenhower West's potential to be an economic engine for the City
- Solve the area's connectivity problems, both internally to the planning area and between the planning area and the rest of Alexandria and with Fairfax County
- Maximize the development potential of the Van Dorn Metro Station Area
- Provide a blueprint for redevelopment that allows a mix of uses, including retaining light industrial/service oriented uses, and allowing uses that are perhaps not known or not well-served today but are emblematic of the future direction of the US economy
- Provide flexibility in the location, type, and intensity of uses so that the area is able to respond to market forces within the broad parameters of desired uses, connections, and appearance of the area.

We feel the plan has done a good job in these areas.

We are disappointed that the timeframe to complete the plan did not allow us to delve into a feasibility analysis of the proposed concept plan and transportation network, nor to define a concrete and fact-based implementation strategy. We recommend that there be a follow-on phase to the planning process focused on these items, to include:

- Analysis of stack height vs building height near the Covanta Plant
- Resolving issues related to the multi-modal bridge and the Norfolk Southern rail line/ethanol transloading facility
- Assessing the viability/feasibility of the proposed T-intersection of Eisenhower Avenue near the Van Dorn Metro
- Assessing the adequacy of the proposed transportation network vis-à-vis development prospects
- Ensuring all landowners are in agreement with the concept plan before any rezoning takes place of their property
- Determining how land assembly and re-subdivision will take place
- Identifying priority development sites
- Determining the match between the pace of growth through private sector efforts vs the pace of public improvements

- Quantifying the cost of public improvements to a greater extent than the initial rough analyses
- Setting forth a timeline of public and private actions to move the plan concept and principles forward.

We have identified a number of policy questions and offer comments on the plan document itself.

Eisenhower Partnership (EP) Policy Issues

1. Multi-modal bridge: EP feels that the multi-modal bridge is a necessary transportation component of the plan, providing a much needed connection between the Van Dorn Metro station and the South Pickett Street corridor. If this bridge proves to be not feasible at the conclusion of discussions with Norfolk Southern, it will be imperative to identify alternative connection points, or the area will not redevelop as desired.
2. Transportation: EP appreciates the City's recognition of the need for transportation improvements to accommodate redevelopment, including intersection upgrades, Van Dorn Street widening, and the addition of new roadways, high capacity transit on Eisenhower Avenue, and more bicycle and pedestrian pathways including the proposed crossing between Eisenhower Avenue and Cameron Station.
3. Metro Station Site: EP feels it is critical to coordinate with WMATA on the redevelopment of their property at the Van Dorn Metro Station. Redeveloping the Metro station effectively requires not just building something on WMATA's existing property, but reconfiguring land holdings and road patterns to provide landbays buildable at a suitable density and height as described on the concept plan.
4. Right of Way: EP recognizes that the implementation of the future desired street grid layout including the required right of way acquisition will be challenging as individual projects develop. We would like to further discuss the reconfiguration of Eisenhower Avenue into a T-intersection.
5. Retail: The potential inclusion of Big Box retail as an interim use is an important feature of the plan, allowing for reuse of certain parcels early in the life of the plan, when higher intensity uses may not be market-feasible.
6. Retail frontage: The office building and residential building first floor retail frontage requirements cause us some concern – given the City's less than stellar history of filling mandated retail frontage at Carlyle and other locations. Further, we remain concerned about the continued insistence on routing trash trucks going to the Covanta plant along Eisenhower Avenue, to the contrary of the concept of a lively commercial and residential street with pedestrian activity. We suggest a southern access road reserved for trash and delivery trucks along the southern border of the plan area.
7. Land use mix: EP wants to ensure that the plan has the appropriate mix of residential, retail and commercial space to maximize the return to the City and properly manage the infrastructure costs and additional burden on City services. While it is true that today's market demand is primarily residential, this could change in the future. Most of the neighborhoods in the plan have what seem to us to be the right mix of uses, with the exception of neighborhoods 5 and 6,

which seem to have insufficient density and too much residential. Particularly in Neighborhood 6 at the intersection of Eisenhower Avenue and the Clermont Connector, there is opportunity for commercial uses such as hotels and shopping centers, or even a conference center.

8. Open space: the plan provides generous open space opportunities, and its approach of allowing development to contribute to major features such as the revitalization of Backlick Run is a good one. EP feels that there are too many new parks specified in the individual neighborhoods, but perhaps the plan's flexibility will allow the balance of open space to development to reach the right levels.
9. Public facilities: The need for a site for an additional public school in Eisenhower West has been identified by other planning efforts, yet this plan does not set aside a specific site. More remains to be done through implementation planning to ensure that a school site is created at some point in the redevelopment process.
10. Transition of uses: EP appreciates the plan's philosophy to entice property owners to redevelop their property, rather than to be forced to close their business and move out of the area.
11. Flexibility: market demand changes over time, as do building and development styles. This plan is groundbreaking in its attempt to remain flexible rather than block-by-block prescriptive. We believe this approach will serve the City well, by allowing a nimble response to development proposals. One area we do have concerns about is the minimum building height; a development should not be denied for the single reason of having, for example, only four stories rather than the required five. Minimum height strays into prescriptive territory and will hamper development potential.
12. Implementation plan: much remains to be done with regard to determining the public sector costs for implementation and the potential level of needed contributions from the development community. The cost estimates identified in the plan are very preliminary, and need to be refined with engineering and other professional inputs. Timeframes need to be better defined, including the phasing of development and public investment. EP recommends establishing an Implementation Committee composed of City staff and private sector parties having an interest in the Eisenhower West area (property owners, potential developers, residents, businesses). A representative of Fairfax County should also participate in this task force.
13. Interim Uses: EP is disappointed that there is almost no discussion of an interim plan – e.g. what is feasible in the next 5 to 10 years. The TSA selection of Victory Center certainly helps create an interest in development in the near term but what are the complementary uses needed? Where should they go? What transportation improvements are necessary? How much public investment will be needed?
14. Relationship between East and West Eisenhower Avenues: EP firmly believes that linking the two ends of Eisenhower Avenue is important, and that the economic development that happens on either end helps the other end. Further, natural features such as Cameron Run are present in both portions of the corridor and there should be a common stormwater management strategy. We would like to see a page devoted to economic development and environmental synergies between these two metro-oriented nodes.

15. Historic past: There should be a brief discussion of the area's history (early railroad corridor, plantations, mill races) This would then be a basis for some future public art or history-recalling building elements.

EP Comments on the Plan Document

These comments follow the plan document page by page.

Acknowledgements – shouldn't people who participated early on but left the Steering Committee early on be acknowledged (e.g Don Buch and someone from the Environmental Policy Commission)?

Page 10, Fig 1.2 – Fairfax County should be labeled along the southern and western borders (Arlington is indicated to the north).

Page 11, bullets on Demographics – this discussion has been misleading from the beginning. There should be acknowledgement that Cameron Station is vastly different from the other three residential projects in Eisenhower West. Further, this is not a culturally and ethnically diverse community the way other parts of the west end are; delete this phrase entirely.

Page 13, market analysis – this section on short, medium and long-term potential is much stronger than in earlier versions. It should be clarified that the top half of the page pertains to current conditions, not necessarily future. For example for hotels, we believe there is opportunity for more than one new mid-priced hotel.

Page 26, land use principles – these are good and reflect what has been discussed in all the meetings.

Page 27, Fig 4.1 – drawing should be labeled "Land Use Concept". Please put a Fairfax County label in the area south of the Metro Station. We are still concerned that the residential rental project on Eisenhower Avenue is still shown in grey as a permanent (not likely to change by 2040) use. It seems the site has redevelopment potential and should show an overlay of mixed use. We are also concerned about the large park shown on the Bush Hill plantation site – has the property owner agreed?

Page 28, top left – first text line has typo on "institutional"

Page 29, Fig. 4.2 – we are concerned with the "required" retail frontages, given the lack of success in other areas of the City in buildings that were required to have retail uses on the ground floor.

Page 31 – There should be a paragraph on how the decision of where to locate a school and community facilities will be made; what happens if the plan runs out of available land before sites are obtained? Which property owner will be made to contribute a site or how will the City go about acquiring a site(s).

Page 32 – PWR uses: Could those uses not go above the 2nd floor (item 6)? In urban areas, such uses can and do go on higher floors. Workshops can be at any level, and certainly are in European cities.

Page 32 – Heavy industrial uses: There should be an alternate route identified for trucks going to Covanta, other than Eisenhower Avenue once redevelopment starts taking place. That means reserving an alignment on the area’s southern boundary.

Page 34 – Transportation and connectivity principles – while the 6 principles outlined here are ones we discussed and agreed to in the Steering Committee meeting, we are concerned with the apparent emphasis on pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and the relative downplaying of the importance of high-capacity transit as well as automobile connectivity. These will be required in order for Eisenhower West to redevelop as desired.

Page 35, Fig 4.4 – EP appreciates the arrow shown going east on Eisenhower Avenue, addressing our point that it is very important to link eastern and western Eisenhower Avenue so that the full benefits of development in each can be obtained. So far the plan has not addressed the methodology whereby right of way for new streets will be obtained, or what happens if an owner/developer wants a different block size or street location than what is shown on the plan drawing. The central street between Eisenhower Avenue and the area’s southern boundary should be shown in dashed lines in the center area dominated by two residential projects. By 2040 it may be important to have this additional parallel road and it should not be precluded by our inability to imagine a redevelopment of these two properties. A southern parallel road should also be shown in dashed lines along the southern boundary. Roads on the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan should be shown, for example, the possible ramp to the Van Dorn Metro Station over Vine Street.

P 43 2040 Build Scenario – Can we have access to the transportation study that yields these conclusions? We have only seen the staff digest of the transportation study. EP views the multi-modal bridge as critical to the redevelopment of Eisenhower West. If the bridge is not feasible, EP feels an equally robust alternative is needed.

P 44 Parks and Open Space – Principles should include fostering active recreation areas, getting better use of the open space that already exists, and maintaining existing and new parks.

P 47 Green Connections – The concept of green fingers connecting parts of the area is appealing. Let’s make sure that safety/security is a big part of the design of these green fingers.

P49 Public Spaces and Plazas – How will the site of the neighborhood public plaza be identified/obtained?

P 52 Fig 4.24 Illustrative Plan -- Thank you for the disclaimer included in this drawing and others. It helps. However we still do not see why staff felt the need for such a drawing; people will tend to take it literally even with the disclaimer.

P 53 Development Density and Land Use – Why can PWR exist only in neighborhood 1? It seems both necessary and likely in the interim term in other neighborhoods, particularly 5 and 6. The development density in neighborhood 6 Clermont appears too low for an area served by a Beltway interchange;

similarly 5 floors seems low. Both are fine for interim development but not long-term. For example, if a hotel wanted to locate here, it would certainly have more stories, perhaps 8 to 10.

P 53 – Building Heights – EP is not comfortable with mandating building height minimums. We support the intent of the minimums but hesitate to deny a development for not having enough stories. Item 4, stating buildings near the Metro WILL be 15-20 stories risks deferring development permanently. Allowing height is one thing; mandating it is another.

P 55 Environmental Sustainability – why do we have a chapter on this? Did we not agree that for environment, public art, affordable housing, and other topics, this plan would adhere to broad adopted City policy? There seems to be too much detailed discussion of alternative energy strategies, detailed stormwater management and water and sewer issues; much of this should be an appendix or separate document. I'd rather have seen a detailed transportation analysis than this analysis.

P 70 Neighborhood 1 – this neighborhood ends up with too much residential land use; building heights don't seem to be a realistic range. PWR uses need to be allowed on several floors vertically. Buildings should not all be residential with a fringe of flex. Discussion of the potential school site is vague, with no mention of how a selection would be accomplished. Transportation and connectivity discussion is good.

P74 Neighborhood 2 – The principles section is a bit weak. The multi-modal bridge (or lack of it) will be a determining factor in the outcome in this neighborhood. Taming the flooding of Backlick Run is going to be a challenge and more intense land uses will be required to provide funding for redesign of the channel, as rightly shown in the land use diagram.

P 85 Neighborhood 4 – This requires close work with WMATA. Nothing will happen here unless the Metro-related development is done right. Who will grant land for an urban plaza? Does this assume a major land consolidation so that there is a piece left over to grant for public land? Covanta Plant needs a substantial facelift to make it compatible with this urban district. The fire station and shooting range will also need to be better integrated into the new surroundings.

P 86 Neighborhood 5 – There are several poor assumptions and missed opportunities here. EP does not agree that the existing rental residential project continue to be grayed out as not a redevelopment opportunity. It is likely to be a candidate for redevelopment prior to 2040 as rental projects often are, either fully or partially. We believe that provision should be made to continue the new street proposed between Eisenhower Avenue and the southern plan boundary, through the two currently residential projects. We also believe there should be a southern driveway along which trash trucks could bring their loads to the Covanta Plant while minimizing use of Eisenhower Avenue. Bush Hill Park seems unnecessary – who will use this park? What is the cost-benefit? That's a lot of land to acquire and maintain with little indication anyone needs it or cares about it. Finally how does the City expect that the industrial properties that are deep with narrow frontage on Eisenhower Avenue will consolidate to enable the creation of a street through their mid-point? A detailed implementation strategy is needed here to clarify intent and feasibility.

P 90 Neighborhood 6 – This neighborhood appears seriously undervalued in the plan, having the least development potential and low building heights despite not being near any residential uses. EP believes the interchange location is an important one for commercial uses; in fact in the past decade a developer proposed a multi-building development that would have contained an office tower, and hotel, and two residential towers. This desirable project would not be possible under the current plan framework. It is not clear why the City should spend taxpayer dollars on an extension to the RPA park west of Clermont Avenue. There is no indication that the plan encourages more active use of Hensley Park as suggested numerous times during Steering Committee discussion.

P 96 Implementation – This is a good beginning; the EP would have preferred these ideas to be more fully developed within the plan so that we would know before plan adoption that the proposed land uses and transportation system are economically feasible. We strongly recommend the creation of an Implementation work group after adoption of the plan.

P 99 Implementation Costs – Obviously these need to be greatly refined. EP believes the costs to be understated.

P 100 Developer Contributions – the suggested \$10-\$12 per square foot should be tested on potential interested developers to determine whether it is feasible. The amount of infrastructure work needed and the lack of a current market make it extremely risky to develop along Eisenhower Avenue in the near future. Early developers should not be asked to make extreme contributions, but rather encouraged to set the pace.

P 100 Next Steps – We concur that there are many next steps required.