

Comments to the Seminary Hill Association's
Annual Meeting, November 10, 2011

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Some Fundamental Things to Keep in Mind
Regarding Transportation in the West End

1. Transportation is a means to an end – economic, social, educational, etc. The transportation system should be defined by a community with respect to those ends which it wishes to achieve.
2. Transportation facilities do not create demand; roads do not create traffic. Land use – the human activity which takes place in those uses – creates the need to get to/from the use. Human activity and the land uses which support that activity are what attract demand and create traffic.
3. A community cannot have its cake and eat it, too. Economic growth and development bring with them demand (in the West End that means chiefly traffic). If we want economic success, we need to be ready to deal with traffic. “The goose that lays the golden eggs leaves other droppings as well.”
4. West End development has been, is today, and even with all the new development planned, will continue to be at a suburban level of density. Tysons Corner, with all its development, is still suburban density. Downtown DC is urban density, and so is the Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor. And unlike those places, the West End is NOT on the Metrorail system, and is not likely ever to be on it. It is irrational and lamentable that the developers and City think they can create and think they are creating an urban environment in the West End. Neither the land use nor the transportation system they envision are urban, and they are NOT in balance with one another.
5. Our city has failed to provide for the transportation system first, before it approved the development. This cart-before-the-horse approach is unlike Arlington, in the Rosslyn – Ballston Corridor, where they had I-66 -- a freeway and an HOV facility -- **and** Metrorail in place before they gave the green light to the creation of significantly more urban densities than in the West End. [As an aside, our City had been on a similar course, targeting where Metrorail existed as its long-term growth areas – Potomac Yards and Eisenhower Valley. Potomac Yards is underway with significant citizen opposition, and the Eisenhower Valley suffers from low market cache other than on the east end, and that gets too much opposition from the Olde Towners, so apparently the attention has turned to the West End. We in the West End have not been as effective as need be to get the City to turn its attention back where it belongs. Arlington got it right: approve and build development where you have a strong capacity to serve it.]
6. Our state provided us with some elements of a high capacity transit system (I-395 HOV, where those 2 lanes carry far more people daily than the regular lanes). Metro and DASH have done some of what is needed to build transit in support of that, and are to be commended. But unless the HOV lane and transit

system is revised to serve Alexandria as a destination for employment trips, rather than just as a source of trips to work from residences, then the West End will not be able to take advantage of the investment by VDOT, Metrobus, and DASH.

7. Even with the development currently approved, we need to be thinking about several things:
 - a. Using the legal, civic, and political tools available to us to ensure that the City does not grant DSUP or SUP approvals without first having in place the transportation system needed to support that development. Such approvals need not be automatic, if the development can be shown to threaten the health and general welfare of the citizenry.
 - b. Insisting that the City and the landowners and developers improve the pedestrian and bicycle connectivity of the West End – it is not up to what it can and should be.
 - c. Recognizing that a new high-capacity transit system will not solve our transportation problem, and instead focusing on evolutionarily growing DASH and Metrobus services in conjunction with the provision of full on/off access to the HOV lanes at Seminary and perhaps at Duke Street.
 - d. Understanding that the mode share for transit for the commuters coming to the West End is likely to be less than 20 percent. Therefore, unless we are willing to accept the congestion, the delay, the health and safety impacts, the poor emergency response time, and the degraded quality of life, we will need to build a well-thought out set of roadway capacity improvements to serve the other 80 percent ... or decide to live without the new development. Roads are not just for cars. The transit that meets the needs of the West End – frequent, reliable, ubiquitous bus service – runs on roads.
8. Citizens are not empowered to make development or transportation investment decisions – our elected and appointed officials do that on our behalf. If we do not get better at selecting those whom we elect, and in influencing those whom they appoint, we will continue to get the Big Lie, which is the notion, popular among elected officials and staff, that all commercial development is good, and more than self-supporting. It is not – not if that development is made to mitigate or pay for the downside which it brings to the community. Elected officials want to make taxpayers happy by keeping tax rates down, which they can do better if they approve more development. Developers are happy to provide financial support to candidates who think this way. President Eisenhower warned us about the military – industrial complex when he left office. That same concern on the local level is the developer-staff-council complex, and that is who is calling the shots.
9. The best way to beat the entrenched interests of the developer-staff-council complex is by bringing better ideas to the table, and not simply being obstructionist. Pick your fights, as you cannot win them all. Do your homework, hold them accountable, challenge them civilly and constructively, and do not back down. We cannot afford to let them get away with another BRAC.