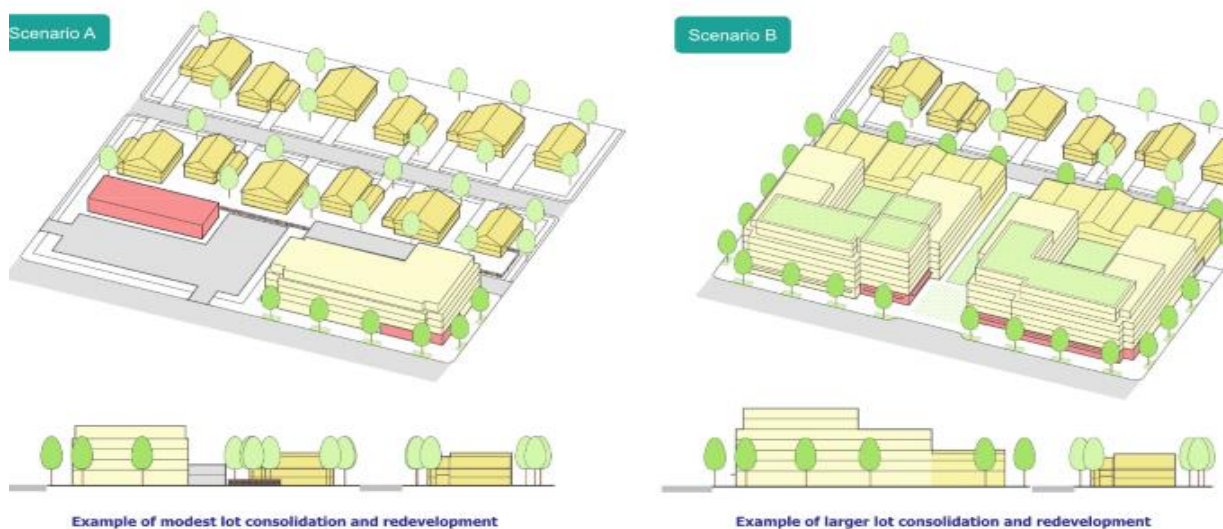


July 2021

## Long-Term Plan for Lee Highway Turns Mid-Century Commercial Strip into Traffic Nightmare and Monopoly Board for Developers



### Plan Lee Highway Revealed - Aha Moment or Uh-Oh Moment?

In May-June 2021, Arlington County's Plan Lee Highway (PLH)<sup>i</sup> staff, the Plan Lee Highway Community Forum (community members appointed by the Board to engage neighborhoods), and the non-profit Lee Highway Alliance (LHA) briefed area civic associations along Lee Highway about massive increases in corridor density being envisioned over the next 30-40 years. ASF has tried to distill here thousands of pages/slides on PLH and the related study proposals known as Scenarios A and B.

The county also conducted a public survey to solicit feedback from residents on the denser land use and new transportation and stormwater plans. Many residents -- who expected the Plan Lee Highway process would add only minimal density, or moderate density at key nodes (such as the intersections at Kirkwood, Glebe and Harrison Streets) -- are now expressing strong

objections. Many reacted negatively to plans showing density/population growth similar to early Metro infill and one observed "it's like downtown Bethesda, but without Metro!"

## **Weigh in Now**

If you missed the survey, please review this paper and the [study documents on PLH website](#), then send your views to:

- Mr. Matt de Ferranti, Chairman, Arlington County Board  
[mdeferranti@arlingtonva.us](mailto:mdeferranti@arlingtonva.us)
- Other County Board members (Ms. Libby Garvey, Mr. Christian Dorsey, Ms. Katie Cristol, Mr. Takis Karantonis),  
[countyboard@arlingtonva.us](mailto:countyboard@arlingtonva.us)
- Ms. Natasha Alfonso-Ahmed, Principal Planner and Plan Lee Highway Project Manager, [nalfonso-ahmed@arlingtonva.us](mailto:nalfonso-ahmed@arlingtonva.us).
- Mr. Paul Holland, Chair, Plan Lee Highway Community Forum,  
[Paul.alexander.holland@gmail.com](mailto:Paul.alexander.holland@gmail.com)
- Ms. Sandi Chesrown, Vice Chair, Plan Lee Highway Community Forum,  
[sandrachesrown07@verizon.net](mailto:sandrachesrown07@verizon.net)

You may also speak directly at the County Board meeting at 8:30 am, Saturday, July 17 at 2100 Clarendon Blvd. Although PLH is not on the agenda, anyone may address an issue of concern at the meeting outset. We also recommend you [watch Agenda Item 25 which the board will discuss at the July 17 meeting](#). This will show how GLUP and zoning changes are related, and it offers a project similar to what PLH would allow along Lee Highway (redeveloping the two-story Days Inn at Rt. 50 and Pershing.)

## **General Background**

### Lee Highway Study Area Map



The county began engaging residents in a "vision" process for Lee Highway in 2016. It produced a [study scope and charge in 2018](#) to "develop a comprehensive vision/policy framework for the proposed study area through . . . adoption of a County plan." PLH documents note that the "Core Study Area is primarily characterized by low-rise commercial land uses with pockets of multi-family residential."<sup>ii</sup>

PLH, the PLH Forum, and LHA have said that proposed changes to the General Land Use Plans (GLUP) do not represent new zoning. But let's be clear: GLUP is a prerequisite to new zoning, and the scoping documents and building heights shown depend on major up-zoning across the expanse of this car-centric corridor.<sup>iii</sup>

### **The Three Areas**

As explained in the scope, the county has defined a [Lee Highway Corridor Planning Area \(LHCPA\) that extends 1/4 mile north and south of the highway, from Virginia Highlands and Lyon Village to Arlington/East Falls Church](#). A smaller area within the LHCPA -- the "**Core Study Area**" (CSA) -- includes current low-density residential areas adjacent to commercial-zoned lots. The county implies it will add density here, noting that "more detailed analysis will be conducted...which provides the most opportunity for change and impact through redevelopment."

Finally, the map shows an area called "**Residential Edges**" (RE), defined as "single-family areas approximately 250 feet from Lee Highway and other arterial streets." The county indicates that staff and the contractor AECOM "will determine where a larger geography should be evaluated [for changes]....] Residential Edges are an opportunity . . . to widen housing choices for middle-income households, i.e., those earning generally 80%-120% of the AMI, coined as the 'Missing Middle.'<sup>iv</sup>

### **Conceptualization: Turning an Aging Car Corridor into a Narrower, More Populous, Less Diverse Car Corridor**

PLH and LHA are briefing residents on these "Scenarios A and B" which reflect massive increases in density, expand land use options and bring substantial consequences for traffic, trees/greenspace, stormwater, school needs, and key demographics across 16 civic associations.

The county intends possibly to double existing populations<sup>v</sup> but its plans will unavoidably remove populations most vulnerable,

as owners will be sorely tempted to [redevelop market rate housing](#) (see p.45). While adding thousands more residents, PLH calls for narrowing Lee Highway itself! More information on streetscapes and transportation is [at slides 13-20 here](#). Detailed road, open space, stormwater, and building density for the five geographic areas are linked below:

- [Areas 1 and 5](#) (Arlington/East Falls Church, Lyon Village, North Highlands);
- [Area 2](#) (John M. Langston, Yorktown, Tara-Leeway Heights, Leeway Overlee);
- [Areas 3 and 4](#) (Waverly Hills, Donaldson Run, Glebewood, Old Dominion, Waverly-Waycroft, Cherrydale, Maywood)

While the county has identified several new [stormwater projects](#), (slides 23-26),<sup>vi</sup> it has failed to fully explain which projects are in the county's regular budget (Capital Improvement Plan or CIP) and which projects need to be added to accommodate the massive increases in density proposed.

### **Underselling GLUP and the Hollow Site Plan Promise**

Instead, the county hints that many benefits along the highway will accrue as part of "later" site plan development that will follow GLUP and zoning changes. This argument is fraught with peril: developers do not cover costs for major infrastructure (schools, large parks). Moreover, major stormwater, road and other capital projects are not part of site planning, they belong in the regular county CIP. On the flip side, if the county indicates PLH does not affect the CIP, that means IT IS NOT PLANNING to budget for the critical land acquisition and infrastructure that these new residents will need. Finally, we have seen several cases where community benefits garnered in return for additional density did not materialize, or proved to be short-lived, WHILE THE DENSITY GRANTED WAS PERMANENT. **The GLUP, once changed, establishes a new land-use policy that will alter our county forever. The new GLUP will not be undone and the new zoning that follows cannot be undone.**<sup>vii</sup>

### **Additional Resources**

We recommend you watch the [Lee Highway Alliance briefing of Area 5 to Lyon Village Civic Association](#) on June 21. Or [listen to part I of questions that LVCA posed to LHA as a result of that briefing](#), or [part 2](#), or [part 3](#). Attached are some of the comments we pulled from the public feedback survey.

**Attachments (Available Separately on ASF website):**

1. Plan Lee Highway - Short Summary of the Ins and Outs
  2. Resident Comments and Feedback on Plan Lee Highway June-July 2021
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**Endnotes**

<sup>i</sup> In June 2021, the County announced it will be renaming Lee Highway Langston Boulevard for local civil rights activist Langston M. Brown. This paper will be updated accordingly when the name changes take effect.

<sup>ii</sup> It also states that "because these land uses aren't integrated..., the area is missing the kind of mixed-use development that supports a walkable, "main street" environment. Presaging the changes envisioned, staff indicated that "the current land use vision and zoning framework ... limit opportunities ... that could serve to meet preliminary aspirational goals including walkability." Other than walkability, we could not ascertain any goals, although the density clearly shows intent to significantly boost population.

<sup>iii</sup> There are qualifications for some planning elements, including East Falls Church and Cherrydale, which have planning processes in place. Please refer to the [map and its key](#) for more detailed information on this.

<sup>iv</sup> ASF notes that [Missing Middle homes built recently -- in areas where it is permitted](#) -- are being sold/marketed from \$850,000-950,000. Mortgages align almost exactly with the median white household income of \$138,000/year, are almost double median African-American HH income, and also exceed average Latino, immigrant, and senior household incomes.

<sup>v</sup> ASF has been unable to get specific numbers for expected population levels for either by-right zoning, or projected scenario A or Scenario B proposals.

<sup>vi</sup> [This slide deck shows stormwater challenges and plans, but also offers concepts on other key themes such as "connectivity," "open space," "street calming," etc.](#) No plans on schools, budgets, trees, or traffic, showing up the stark contrast between developer-driven and community-driven planning.

<sup>vii</sup> It is generally accepted that any downgrading of the maximum developable yield on a property would be considered illegal under the Virginia Constitution's takings clause, which states: "no private property shall be damaged or taken for public use without just compensation to the owner."