

July 1, 2021

Community Update: RST Hasty Highrise Housing Proposal

The concerns of the Forest Lakes and Hollymead communities about density, traffic and other issues that we have identified in the recently updated RST proposal were again presented to the Albemarle County Planning Commission at its June 15 meeting, with extensive written comments submitted on behalf of your Forest Lakes Community Association (and the Hollymead Citizens Association), and by many individual residents. (you can find the full history of this issue and supporting information at www.forestlakes.net/announcements) Thank you for your continued participation in this important matter.

The allure of a large increase in affordable housing (a component of the recently updated RST proposal) – albeit in tall, concentrated buildings, despite a number of design issues and weaknesses in the plan raised by Commission members, and without having any overall County plan or community consensus in place on how to meet affordable housing goals, the RST proposal proved irresistible to the Planning Commission, who voted to move the plan forward for consideration by the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors.

We were disappointed that what we are now calling the RST Hasty Highrise Housing plan is proceeding, and continue to believe it is too dense, too tall, has a significant risk of causing local traffic and environmental problems, and is an unprecedented and undesirable next step in turning our area into Fairfax.

As we have said all along, we do not oppose redevelopment of this site and support the goal of increasing affordable housing in the County, but they need to be done responsibly and taking into consideration the effects on our existing neighborhoods and on the entire Places 29 / Route 29 North area. As such, approving this plan was hasty in several respects, as detailed below.

Based on community involvement to date, the revised plan does incorporate some significant improvements compared to the initial submission, and addresses several issues we had raised, notably: (1) improving the aesthetics along Ashwood Boulevard with retention of the existing berm and trees along the north side of Ashwood and increasing the distance between Ashwood and the first of the row of 4 story ‘townhouse’ buildings. And (2) doubling the width of the tree buffer (to 40 feet) with the Ashland townhouse community and including 4th floor setbacks for the RST buildings. If this development is ultimately approved, we will work to ensure that these commitments are legally binding and are fulfilled.

We will continue our efforts to right-size this proposal, decreasing density and addressing traffic and environmental concerns, and hope the developer will become more engaged with the community in doing so.

More broadly, we will urge the Board of Supervisors to disapprove the current RST Hasty Highrise Housing and send it back for further revisions, and also to address three key topics: (1) developing a new transitional zoning category for the 29 North corridor with lower density and more respect for existing neighborhoods. (2) updating the process for reviewing potential traffic impacts, and applying them to revised plans for this site, and (3) creating a broader community consensus about how and where and how to provide and configure the added affordable housing that we all agree is needed in the County.

As always, thanks to everyone for their participation in this issue. We will continue to keep you informed via this newsletter, emails (contact Tamera at manager@forestlakes.net to be added to the distribution list, and the ForestLakes.net website. We welcome your added comments as well – with the best method being to email Tamera as above

Thank you,

Scott Elliff, Member, FLCA Board of Directors