The RST Residences development was approved by the Board of Supervisors on September 14 by a 5-1 vote.  Fundamentally, the desire for added affordable housing ruled the day, though there was consideration given to all the issues that we all raised.  We got substantial personal attention from the Supervisors – your voices were certainly heard. In fact, the discussion got the developer more squarely on the record regarding commitments to aesthetics, tree retention, storm water management controls and related topics that have long concerned us.  We need to wish them well and hope that the development is a success.  As it proceeds, we anticipate providing ‘oversight’ to ensure that promises are kept, and the design follows the outlines that we all commented on.  Our supervisor, Bea Lapisto-Kirtley, was the last to vote and voted against the proposal, in what was a surprise to many of us who worked closely on the proposal as we had not gotten much (if any) positive feedback from the emails everyone wrote or the meeting with her that close to 100 of you attended.  Perhaps, we’re hoping, the significance of Forest Lakes as a constituent base became clear along the way.

It’s also important to note that during the course of this effort we got a number of things changed, to our benefit, notably a wider tree buffer and increased building set-backs vis Ashland townhomes, improved aesthetics along Ashwood Boulevard, including added set-backs and retention of the berm and trees there, and some reduction in the total number of units (now 332 vs 370-390 initially – yes, still a large number).  We continue to be concerned about traffic, and as RST and Brookhill build out, we will monitor the situation and will be prepared to engage VDOT if some changes are warranted.

A special thanks to Jimmy Baranik , Rich DiMeglio, Paula Grazzini, Jane Keathley, Tamera Hammond, and George Pearsall for their selfless and dedicated – and time consuming – ongoing attention to this issue – and at least a dozen others who have provided great insights and supporting materials along the way – thank you all.

More involvement from local citizens will be needed to curb additional outsized development in our area, especially with this project setting a precedent that other developers will refer to.  As the county updates the Comprehensive Plan, as well as the Places 29 plan which is for our area, it will be important to reconsider zoning and land use designations that govern future developments.  The RST parcel was slated for 6-34 units per acre, back when the Places 29 plan was first adopted about a decade ago. RST could have been worse. Thirty four units per acre would translate to 8-story buildings.  The local Community Advisory Committee (CAC) is beginning to address this issue, and we’d encourage your participation.  In Crozet, the CAC has developed a new zoning category of 2-12 units per acre for transitional areas that abut existing neighborhoods – and that could be an appropriate level here too.

Scott Elliff

Member, FLCA Board