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Planning Commission Sends 6 Million-Square Foot Rivana at Innovation Station to Future Work Sessions

The development team behind the 80-acre Rivana at Innovation Station presented their plans for more than 2,700 multifamily units and up to 2.4 million-square feet of office, 347,000-square feet of retail space, 450 hotel rooms, and nearly nine acres of connected parkland and urban open space to the planning commission this month.

“The vision is spectacular,” said Commission Chair Forest Hayes (At Large) at the April 26th public hearing. “They are bringing Loudoun’s west into Loudoun’s east—I just think that is brilliant.”



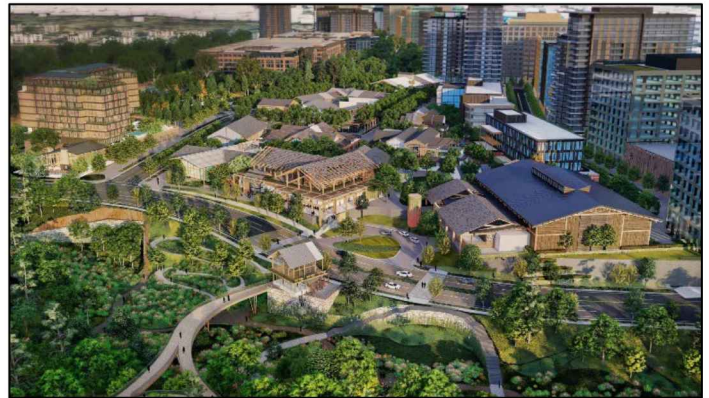
Rivana at Innovation Station; Birds Eye Rendering
Source: ZMAP 2021-0003 Design Guidelines (4/26/2022)

A significant gap, however, remains between the applicant—master developer Novais Partners and its partner the Hanover Company—and county staff. The commission voted unanimously to send the application to at least two future work sessions to hammer out the laundry list of outstanding issues presented by staff at the April public hearing.

“I want to see this come to fruition. So, it pains me to say that I think there is a great deal of work to be done,” Hayes continued. “I am not here to do harm—I want this to succeed.”

The latest CDP drawings show a total of 14 development blocks: high-rise office development up to 20 stories will frame the highly-visible frontage along the Dulles Toll Road to the south, mid-rise multifamily (inclusive of 218 Unmet Housing Needs Units) will anchor the western end and the Innovation Avenue frontage to the north, and a lower-density, retail-centric Village Center will occupy the center of the site.

Two major open spaces—the eight-acre Horsepen Park to the west and the four-acre Boulder Ridge to the east—will bookend a landscaped pedestrian path connecting the development to the CIT site (also owned by the applicant) and Innovation Center Metrorail station in Fairfax County.



Rivana at Innovation Station; Village Center Rendering
Source: ZMAP 2021-0003 Staff Report (4/26/2022)

The applicant is proposing to lead development with the Village Center—“our heart and soul,” according to attorney Tony Calabrese (DLA Piper)—a retail-focused, heavily-landscaped core, as well as the two major parks.

“The anchors are the open spaces,” he told the commission. “That is the only way to be successful with this kind of development in a post-COVID world.”

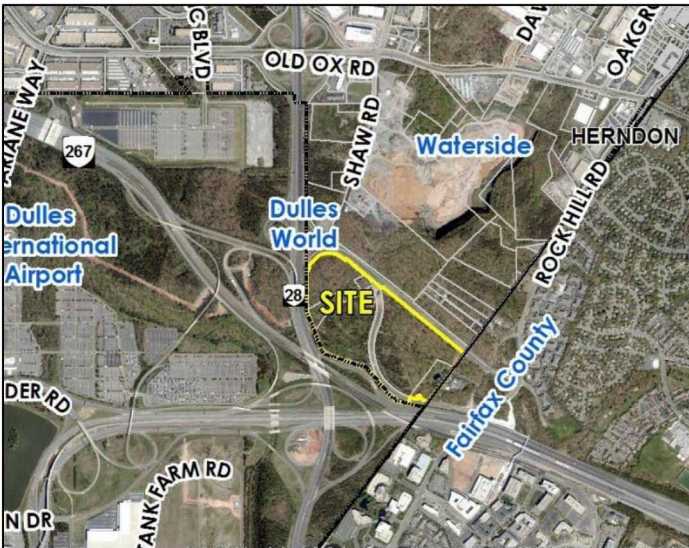
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Rivana at Innovation Station; Land Use Map
(yellow: multifamily; red: retail; blue: office/hotel)
Source: ZMAP 2021-0003 Design Guidelines (4/26/2022)

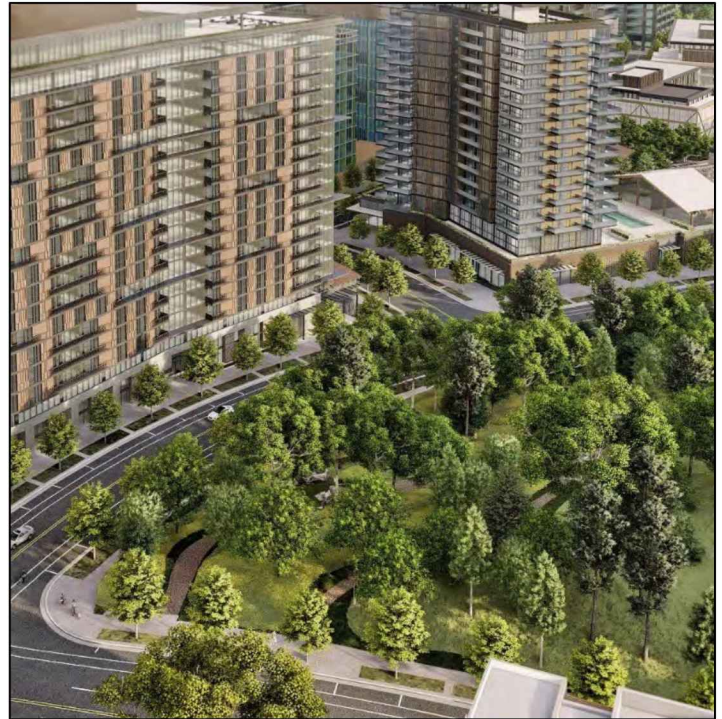
“The intention with this project is to lead with extraordinary placemaking,” added co-developer Tristan Simon. “We then create a destination that begins to magnetize higher-density development: residential, commercial, hospitalization.”



Rivana at Innovation Station; Site Map
Source: ZMAP 2021-0003 Staff Report (4/26/2022)

Before that vision can be realized however, the applicant and county staff must come to terms on the litany of outstanding issues. Most notable: the application deviates from the use mix recommendations of the Urban Transit Center place type (75-/20-/5-percent residential/non-residential/civic recommended); the Village Center (which will include one-story retail buildings) does not comply with the place type design guidelines; the applicant and

county staff remain far apart on the transportation and capital facility contributions; and the county does not support the applicant’s proposed stream restoration plan.



Rivana at Innovation Station; East District Rendering
Source: ZMAP 2021-0003 Design Guidelines (4/26/2022)

Calabrese conceded that the application “is not as clean as anyone would like;” however, he added that the next submission will reflect the recent progress made with staff over the past few months and provide the commission with more clarity heading into the work sessions. He and the applicant did make it clear, however, that the proposed project will not be able to close the gap on all outstanding issues while remaining economically viable.

“This is a very large, generational, multiphase project with serious ambition,” Simon told the commission. “It is impossible to look 5, 10, 15 years down the road and know what the market is going to require of you.”

Simon added that the development team has already spent \$15 million on design, engineering, and other pre-development work—a sum that reflects their serious intention to move forward with first-phase development at Rivana.

“You don’t do that unless you’re intending to build it,” he explained.

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“We are trying to thread a needle financially, but we know if we can get it through, we can do this,” he added. “[But] if we capitulate on certain issues, our project dies.”



Rivana at Innovation Station; Village Center Street-Level
Source: ZMAP 2021-0003 Design Guidelines (4/26/2022)

Planning commissioners expressed appreciation for the applicant’s frankness, noting that focusing on areas where compromise can be made at future work sessions would be the best approach.



Rivana at Innovation Station; Village Center Retail
Source: ZMAP 2021-0003 Design Guidelines (4/26/2022)

“I would hate for us in our limited time to be spinning our wheels on things where you ultimately cannot budge,” said Ashburn Commissioner Eric Combs.

At least two work sessions are planned—tentatively for June and July—to cover issues related to land use, design, civic space, natural resources, parking, transportation, contributions, and parks.

“There is no doubt this is an exciting and unique project,” closed Broad Run Commissioner Michelle Frank.

“But like anytime we try to do something that hasn’t been done before...we need to examine thoroughly and tread

carefully, measuring our risks with the benefits—we are threading a needle on our end too.”

Board Pumps Brakes on Data Center Restrictions in Route 7 Corridor, Dulles Cloud South

The Loudoun County Board of Supervisors stepped back from restricting data center development along the Route 7 corridor and undeveloped areas in the southern parts of the county, according to discussion at the April 20th Transportation and Land Use Committee (TLUC).

Acknowledging the “high stakes of the game,” TLUC chair Michael Turner now plans a three-part Data Center Discussion Series to address any revisions to policies and regulations going forward amid the “rapidly-changing, high-demand, and high-growth environment” of the data center industry.

“This is fraught with challenges for them, fraught with challenges for us,” he added. “It is very important...to establish a baseline of common understanding and common ground.”

The new approach is a stark turnaround from the February TLUC meeting, where members directed county staff to pursue zoning ordinance changes that would prohibit data centers along the Route 7 corridor and quashed any exploration into allowing data center uses in Dulles Cloud South, a 2,000-acre “opportunity area” south of Braddock Road largely within the Transition Policy Area (TPA).

TLUC anticipates three future meetings to focus on the following issues:

Route 7 Corridor. The 2019 comprehensive plan designated large swaths of the Route 7 corridor as Suburban Mixed-Use (SMU) place type, which does not envision data centers as a core, complementary, or conditional use. However, the county’s zoning ordinance has not yet been updated to align with the plan, opening the door for owners of PD-OP- and certain PD-IP-zoned properties within the SMU place type to develop data centers by-right.

To remedy that, staff recommended the creation of a Suburban Mixed-Use overlay district as part of the zoning ordinance re-write process that would modify the list of