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Planning Commission Greenlights New Fair Oaks Mall Plan; More Residential, Less Retail Proposed

The owners of Fair Oaks Mall secured planning commission support for a comprehensive plan amendment that will permit up to 4.8 million-square feet of mixed-use development at the 109-acre, 40-year-old mall site.

The plan amendment features a shift to residential development and away from retail, as well as a “decoupling” of higher development intensities from transit improvements and the extension of Metrorail’s Orange Line.



Fair Oaks Mall; Illustrative Aerial Rendering

Source: Planning Commission Public Hearing (9/16/20)

“The resulting land use mix would continue to maintain a sound employment base in support of transit area objectives, while providing new sources of housing for the area,” said Commission Chair Peter Murphy (Springfield) at the September 16th public hearing.

Current plan guidance calls for mixed-use redevelopment of the 1.7-million-square-foot mall property up to a 0.65 FAR, with higher densities achievable if certain road and transit improvements become available, including bus-rapid

transit (0.80 FAR) and the aforementioned Metro extension (1.0 FAR). At max buildout, the current plan anticipates that retail would continue as the predominant use (45 percent), supplemented by up to 1.4 million-square feet of residential (29 percent), 900,000-square feet of office (20 percent) and 300,000-square feet of hotel use (6 percent).



Fair Oaks Mall; Northside Plaza and Residential

Source: Planning Commission Public Hearing (9/16/20)

In lieu of the tiered approach, Taubman Properties is proposing a simplified development option which does not increase the overall maximum density (1.0 FAR) but would eliminate the transit thresholds as BRT is no longer considered for the location and any extension of Metrorail remains on the far horizon.

The amendment also modifies the land use mix to reflect market trends, increasing the residential allotment to 45 percent (up to 1,200 low-rise multifamily units and 790 high-rise multifamily units) and cutting the retail component in half (as low as 20-percent of the use mix; from two million to one-million square feet). The remaining development potential will be reserved for office (25 percent) and hotel (10 percent).

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The proposed plan anticipates that the existing mall would downsize—three of the mall’s five anchors are currently in bankruptcy or planning significant store closures—with a significant portion of the surface parking to the north and south of the retail core to be replaced by mid- and high-rise residential development.

Attorney Antonio Calabrese (DLA Piper) presented an illustrative conceptual plan that represents Taubman Properties’ “current best thinking:” an entirely new residential north district flanked by high-rise office and hotel buildings, with two highly-visible “logical office locations” along I-66 to the south of the mall. The future redevelopment will include a series of “well-located public plazas” and programmable spaces, an emphasis on open space as investment that was praised by the planning commission.



Fair Oaks Mall; Future Metro Landing Plaza

Source: Planning Commission Public Hearing (9/16/20)

“Rather than just taking a cosmetic approach to greenspace and parks, it is an opportunity to use parks as places of activation and to draw people in,” said Lee District Commissioner Daniel Legana.

While no definitive timeline is in place, Calabrese told the commission that the comprehensive plan amendment will be an important first step toward encouraging and incentivizing ownership and the anchor tenants to work together toward redevelopment. He added that the applicant has already received “inquiries from the market” due to the high-profile nature of the amendment.

“With your help and the board’s endorsement, my hope is that we will come to consensus very quickly and move forward with a rezoning application,” he said.

At the urging of county staff and the Springfield land use committee—which voted unanimously to support the project—the applicant included a development scenario that envisions a 1.5 FAR if Metrorail is extended to the

property, with the majority of the additional density focused on additional office space. While supportive of the option, Providence Commissioner Philip Niezelski-Eichner suggested that development intensity might be too low to warrant the level of public investment for a new Metrorail station.

Calabrese responded that the 1.5 FAR designation was a “more modest, more conservative” estimate and assured the commission that the conceptual plan could accommodate additional density.



Fair Oaks Mall; Northside Central Plaza

Source: Planning Commission Public Hearing (9/16/20)

“We are very open to what would be the right density,” he said.

The board of supervisors will hold a public hearing on the proposed Fair Oaks Mall comprehensive plan amendment at its October 7th business meeting.

Commission Defers Decision on Westfields Residential Rezoning

The planning commission pushed a vote on Stanley Martin Homes’ proposed 134-unit residential community in Westfields to November after a contentious public hearing over airport noise this month. The Stonebrook at Westfields proposal, which would permit 120 stacked multifamily units and 14 single-family townhomes on the northern edge of Land Unit J, is the third rezoning case considered this year by the planning commission in the 1,100-acre area south of Dulles International Airport that was previously off-limits to residential development.

“We believe the benefits of residential here will not only drive the demand for retail and employment uses, but also keep Westfields competitive as a jobs center relative to new mixed-use center that are in the region,” said attorney Andrew Painter