

City of Fairfax Planning Commission  
Fairfax, Virginia

Dear Chairman Cunningham and Members of the Planning Commission:

Fairfax City Citizens for Smarter Growth provides the following comments on proposed redevelopment of the Paul VI High School site, as presented to you and the Planning Commission at a joint work session September 6, 2016. The developer, IDI, Inc., presented two alternatives for developing the 18.5 acre site. Scheme A would rebuild the school façade on another building, and provide 646 residential units and 20,000 square feet of commercial space. Scheme B is almost identical, except it would preserve the original school and provide 575 residential units and 20,000 square feet of commercial space. Both schemes provide a substantial increase the existing impervious surface on the site.

The site is unique both in its size and the amount of open space it encompasses. The open space includes a track, sports playing field, and front yard for the school as well as two residential lots totaling 3.4 acres and possessing several of the largest trees in the neighborhood.

Fairfax City Citizens for Smarter Growth<sup>1</sup> supports *compact, mixed-use projects which efficiently use land that has already been developed in order to preserve the city's limited supply of existing open space*. Further, we support development along Fairfax Boulevard as described in the Fairfax Boulevard Master Plan vision: mixed-use centers joined together by commercial connectors. The Paul VI site is located between the Kamp Washington and Northfax Centers in the area identified as the “west connector.” In this area, the Fairfax Boulevard Master Plan envisions “lower scale buildings (predominantly 1 to 3 stories) with emphasis on accessibility, improvements in architectural and site design, and appropriate “interface” between the commercial boulevard and existing neighborhoods.”

IDI presented two concepts that recognized, with different approaches, the significance of the school building to our community. We appreciate some aspects of IDI's preliminary designs for the Paul VI site. For instance, the proposed building design and orientation to Route 50, along with the addition of a slow lane, will contribute to a more bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly street. Further, the concepts for interior streets are very sound, with bulb-outs, parallel parking and other traffic calming features that should be retained in future modifications of the site plan. Along McLean Avenue, the plans for homes up to the street with parking in back, along with a new multi-use trail, would make this street more inviting for walking and bicycling.

However, we have some significant concerns about the proposed redevelopment:

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of Smart Growth, see [This is Smart Growth](#), published by the International City/County Management Association and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2006.

- It includes a minimal, insufficient amount of public open space. The design should include more public open space adjacent to Pat Rodio Park (e.g., a playground), available to residents of the new development and existing neighborhood. Further, the design should preserve the existing large trees on the two Cedar Avenue residential lots. Because the site is the headwaters of Accotink Creek, the design should reduce (not increase) the impervious surface area on the site to improve the quality of water discharged to the creek.
- It provides insufficient commercial space fronting on Fairfax Boulevard. In the proposed design, retail and commercial space is nested inside the development. It should front the street in order to attract more foot traffic along Fairfax Boulevard.
- We favor complete street design and believe that the project should provide and improve connections with the Cedar, Keith and McLean Street grid to smooth traffic flow throughout the area. The proposal includes bicycle and pedestrian connections between the two halves of Cedar Avenue, but not an automobile connection. This is an appropriate compromise between the complete streets goal and the concerns of existing residents.

Recently, Fairfax City Citizens for Smarter growth has supported higher density redevelopment projects, including *Novus Gateway* and *Scout on the Circle*. These compact, mixed-use projects have the potential to efficiently use land that has already been developed, replacing existing buildings and parking lots.

In contrast to these two projects, the Paul VI site includes large non-built areas. Further, a new condominium development (*The Vineyard*) with 132 residential units, is under construction ¼ mile from the Paul VI site. That new development will increase demands on Pat Rodio Park, which will be even further stressed if 600 new residential units are built on the Paul VI site. For this reason, we believe the density of development proposed by IDI, Inc. is not appropriate for the site. Instead, the city should work with the current land owner to come up with a scheme to integrate a portion of the site with the adjacent Pat Rodio Park, to provide recreation facilities for the current neighborhood residents, the Vineyard, and new residents on Paul VI site.

As Fairfax City updates its comprehensive plan, it is critical that the Planning Commission and City Council develop a clear land use plan to guide the redevelopment of the west connector area including the Paul VI and the Breezeway Motel sites.

Sincerely,  
Betsy Bicknell for  
Fairfax Citizens for Smarter Growth

C:  
Mayor David Meyer  
Fairfax City Council  
Brooke Hardin, Director of Community Development and Planning  
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