



March 29, 2018

Planning Commission
City of Fairfax
10455 Armstrong Street
Fairfax, VA 22030

Dear Chairman Cunningham and Members of the Planning Commission:

We are writing in regard to the application from IDI Fairfax, LC for rezoning of the Paul VI site. IDI has met with our group several times over the course of their development of their plans.

Fairfax City Citizens for Smarter Growth promotes more vibrant and walkable communities. We welcome new development that expands transportation choices, creates vibrant public spaces, is environmentally responsible, improves the balance of office, commercial and residential uses in the city, and increases housing options for people of all ages and income levels.

The enclosed checklist provides detailed comments on the application based on our group's priorities. Below are our main comments about the application, relating to the transportation network, public space, mix of uses and housing options.

Transportation: Walking and bicycling: The application provides a strong network of pedestrian and bicycle-friendly sidewalks, internal streets and trails within the site. It creates an internal street grid and walking/bicycling network, and shared-use path along McLean Avenue. It incorporates a local service lane along Fairfax Boulevard, except for the block occupied by the preserved school building. The internal streets include traffic calming features such as bulb-outs and parallel parking. The main entrances to the community and commercial buildings would face the Fairfax Boulevard green space, rather than the surface parking lots on the side.

There is one gap in the bicycle network. The project does not provide bicycle access between Oak Street and Keith Avenue. We support incorporating a trail along the new open space north of Rodio Park to complete the bike network.

In addition to the bike parking specified in the General Development Plan, we recommend that the project provide accessible bike storage facilities for residents of the condominium building. Bike storage should be placed in an area of the building that residents can enter and exit by bicycle without facing conflicts with entering and exiting motor vehicles (not in the parking garages).

Transportation: Street grid: The application does not provide any new street connections for motor vehicles. The only points of entry and egress would be at Oak Street and Fairfax Boulevard. This is a significant problem for a project near Fairfax Boulevard that plans to add more than 300 residential units. It will create major pressures, especially during peak hours, to enter and exit Fairfax Boulevard. The additional traffic exiting the project via Oak Street to Main Street will also increase congestion at the Oak and Main intersection, already affected by the new Mount Vineyard residences.

Creating a more connected street grid is critical to mitigating traffic congestion. It provides motorists with other routes and removes local traffic from overburdened arterial roads. This project provides an opportunity to build out that grid system. For example, the project could extend Keith Avenue directly to Fairfax Boulevard at the existing traffic light. This could be done without negatively affecting the quality of life of nearby residents through traffic calming features such as narrow travel lanes, bulb-outs, pedestrian-scale lighting, and by the placement of curbing to prevent exiting southbound traffic from turning left onto Cedar Avenue. Furthermore, this is a unique opportunity to connect both ends of Cedar Avenue and thereby complete the grid system. If there is no consensus for doing so at this time, the development should still provide the opportunity for a future connection. This would necessitate that the most southern row of townhouses be eliminated or moved northward so that the entrance from Oak Street could be more of a straight line toward the east end of Cedar Avenue, much as it is now.

The failure to build out a connected grid and distribute traffic more evenly will add to the City's traffic problems. At the very least, because of its higher intensity of uses including new retail and community uses, the project should provide at least one new vehicle access point besides Fairfax Boulevard, such as along McLean Avenue.

Public space: The project has a strong plan for expanding access to parks and other open spaces. It creates a network of publicly accessible open spaces, including along the floodplain on the western side; new park space adjacent to Rodio Park; pocket parks throughout the site; and the shared-use trail along McLean. Public space is accessible to pedestrians from all sides, and as such is integrated with the surrounding neighborhoods. The central open space is “Reunion Square” along Fairfax Boulevard, on the site of the current lawn space fronting Paul VI. This will be accessible on foot to the residents and the nearby community through the network of parks and sidewalks. IDI plans to provide seating areas throughout these public spaces, an important feature in making public spaces more inviting places in which to walk, talk, and relax.

The success of Reunion Square will depend on the City's commitment to working with the property manager to develop and promote programs that will make this space vibrant and welcoming.

The application specifies the removal of a significant cluster of mature trees near Cedar Avenue. The October 2017 staff report on the previous application recommended -- and we agree -- that “the site plan be revised to accommodate significant trees or stands of trees that can contribute

toward aesthetic appeal, screening, shade, or other benefit to the site or surrounding community” (p. 10). Specifically, we believe that the project would better serve the needs of the new residents and the nearby neighborhood if the mature trees on the portion of the property that is currently designated as a historic district were preserved while at the same time the two deteriorating structures on that plot were removed. This could establish a new corner park that would lessen the impact of the development on the neighborhood.

Mix of uses: A mix of homes, stores, services and offices knit together by walkable streets creates vibrant places with active street life. The 2007 Fairfax Boulevard Master Plan called for creating these kinds of mixed-use communities at redevelopment opportunities along Fairfax Boulevard. However, the Master Plan did not anticipate a different use of the Paul VI site. In addition, the City-commissioned study by Streetsense significantly qualified the Master Plan's assumptions about retail and commercial demand on Fairfax Boulevard, recommending that intensive mixed-use redevelopment be focused in Northfax.

Given these factors, we think that the applicant has developed a sensible plan that redevelops the site for housing while contributing to the basic mixed-use vision of the Fairfax Boulevard Master Plan. It provides limited retail at two new buildings near Fairfax Boulevard, and "live/work" townhouses allowing for ground-floor commercial uses along Fairfax Boulevard.

The largest non-housing use would be in the restored school building. The applicant proposes to preserve the shell of the existing building and restore and reuse the building for community and/or commercial/retail uses. While these kinds of adaptive reuse projects can be very successful in restoring older, valued buildings for new uses to address community needs, their success depends on a clear alignment between the buildings' forms and these needs. They are often expensive and depend on a strong financing mechanism to be completed and sustainably operated. We hope that the school building can be successfully restored and become a vibrant community-serving space, but there are significant costs and uncertainties.

Housing options: Not only has the intensive residential redevelopment originally proposed been reduced from 555 units to between 302 and 321 units, but the public space has been increased in response to feedback from community groups such as ours who recognized these as priorities. However, IDI has accomplished this by eliminating rental units, including the market-rate smaller units that would have been affordable for older residents and others for whom rental is the most viable housing option. The project does provide an estimated 75-80 one-bedroom condominium units initially priced from the high \$200,000s to about \$350,000. However, this housing will still be out of reach for many people who live and work in the City and who have the biggest need for more housing options.

Housing for middle-income and lower-income residents, who perform many of the jobs that the City relies on to remain a great place to live, is not being produced in numbers necessary to satisfy the demand. Near Paul VI, the City approved in 2015 replacement of 110 affordable units with the Mount Vineyard project, with prices in the \$600-700K range.

To restore a better balance and expand housing options for the full range of area residents and City workers and their income levels, we recommend that the project restore other types of housing stock, such as smaller rental units as contained in the original application.

Summary

In general, we believe that IDI has been diligent and responsive in incorporating and adapting its plans to a wide and often conflicting range of public input and City guidance. The plan has many excellent and creative features, including a strong network of parks and trails, pedestrian access to existing neighborhoods, and walking and bicycling improvements that could make this section of Fairfax Boulevard much more inviting.

However, the project has weaknesses that stem from a lack of clear planning guidance provided by the City. Until the Archdiocese's 2015 announcement of the plans to move Paul VI to Loudoun County, there was no planning or public discussion on the future disposition of this 19-acre site. More broadly, the city has no plan for the redevelopment of the area west of Paul VI, bounded by Oak and Walnut Streets and Cedar Avenue, even though that area seems likely to experience redevelopment.

The City, not the private sector, should take the initiative to develop an area plan that reflects the input of nearby residents, property owners and other stakeholders. In the absence of such a planning process, the City will continue to get less than optimal results in redevelopment opportunities. We would like the City to take a more comprehensive approach to this project that includes nearby neighborhoods and future redevelopment.

Sincerely yours,

Mike Fabio, Betsy Bicknell and Douglas Stewart
Fairfax City Citizens for Smarter Growth

Enc.

Cc:

Mayor and City Council

Paul Nabti, Dept. of Community Development and Planning

Brooke Hardin, Dept. of Community Development and Planning

Tommy Scibilia, Dept. of Community Development and Planning

Fairfax City Citizens for Smarter Growth

IDI PAUL VI CHECKLIST

March 2018

Fostering strong businesses and generating tax revenues to support first-class services and public infrastructure	Y	N	N/A (not applicable)	Notes
Provides a range of business sizes in a compact walkable district with office, retail and residential uses integrated into them	y			Predominantly residential, but many stores and some offices are nearby and area probably does not warrant more retail and commercial. Adds limited retail space close to Fairfax Boulevard.
Includes retail store locations facing onto roads and sidewalks that meet the requirements of walkable neighborhoods	y			Limited retail/community uses will face pedestrian-friendly interior streets. Townhomes along Fairfax Boulevard allow ground-floor commercial uses.
Walkway is wide enough to accommodate outdoor sandwich signs, street furniture, outdoor dining areas, where applicable	Y			12' paved sidewalk zone along Fairfax Boulevard, buffered by local service lane, will create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. 10' sidewalks along community and retail buildings, 5' interior streets. General design provides for a safe and pleasant walking experience.
Provides seating or other amenities in pedestrian areas	Y			Benches and other are planned at pocket parks throughout the site, in village green in front of school building and near Rodio Park. The designs along McLean and open space provisions offer a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Landscaping softens the hardscape of building and sidewalk	Y			Landscaped buffers between sidewalks and street along interior streets, Fairfax Boulevard and McLean Ave.
Outdoor lighting illuminates the storefront and signage and is at a pedestrian scale	Y			Pedestrian-scale lighting per Section 4.8 of zoning ordinance.
Improves the balance of office, retail and residential units in Fairfax City and immediately surrounding area	Y			Residential focus aligns with Streetsense market study, which indicated that connector areas should not be retail or commercial. Residential focus is synergistic with nearby retail.
Provides on-street parallel parking	y			
Commercial space creates a continuous street front leading from one block to another		N		Design along Fairfax Boulevard retains existing footprint rather than building fully up to street. However, residential frontage and the two commercial buildings are close to street and create a more pedestrian-friendly environment on Fairfax Boulevard.
Commercial space is visible from public streets	Y			The retail and community uses would be visible and accessible from Fairfax Boulevard.
Loading zones are centrally located to serve the commercial district, and do not disrupt pedestrian continuity	Y			Two loading areas are provided, one located between the condominium and community buildings and the other in front of the eastern commercial building.

Providing places and means for city residents and visitors to be healthy and physically active	Y	N	N/A	Notes
Provides publicly accessible and usable open space or recreational amenities	Y			Creates a network of publicly accessible open spaces, including along floodplain on western side, allowing access to the central new open space facing Fairfax Boulevard; new park space adjacent to Rodio Park; pocket parks throughout site; and trail along McLean. More open space should be provided along Cedar Ave and around the corner of McLean Ave to buffer the neighborhood from the new development.
Contributes to and provides appropriate connections to the local pedestrian/bike network for the following categories:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sidewalk network 	Y			Strong pedestrian accessibility improvements over the current site.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recreational trails 	Y			Sidewalks and trails within open space create an integrated pedestrian network throughout the property.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bicycle network 	Y			Lacks bike connections west of Keith on south end. A trail threading through the entire open space north of Rodio would fill this gap. Expands bike network along McLean.
Strengthens pedestrian connections to existing, off-site recreational facilities and open spaces	Y			Rodio Park extension integrates the park within this project.

Expanding transportation choices	Y	N	N/A	Notes
Streets are connected internally and to the larger street network at appropriate intervals. Provides a street grid and smaller block sizes.			Both	Creates an internal grid and pedestrian network. No new vehicular connections to the surrounding streets, which will further burden traffic on Fairfax Boulevard and Oak Street
Streets include traffic calming features such as narrow travel lanes, tree buffers on sidewalk, median refuge islands, narrow curb radii, bulb-outs	Y			
Includes centrally located, convenient bike parking	Y			Bike parking in front of commercial buildings, along McLean and near Rodio Park. Should also provide bike storage within condo building, and separate from parking garage entrance to avoid bike/auto conflicts.
Offers shuttle service to Metro (and other regional destinations), contributes to a city-wide shuttle service and/or provides subsidized CUE passes		N		Developer to provide \$25 Smartrip cards to residents.
Helps make adjacent thoroughfares less intimidating to pedestrians, by bringing buildings closer to the street, adding traffic signals or pedestrian amenities, or designing entrances to encourage slow approaches	Y			It creates a more walkable environment along Fairfax Boulevard, including a slow lane, shared-use path, pedestrian refuge median, and townhouses up to street. Provides an internal street network with traffic calming features such as tight curb radii, bulb-outs, landscaped buffers and parallel parking. 14' internal travel lanes at entrance to Fairfax Boulevard seem overly wide, could encourage fast speeds and make the street intimidating for pedestrians to cross (42' total crossing). Vehicle turning movements at peak hours will greatly

				increase at Fairfax Boulevard entrance, making crossings potentially more dangerous for pedestrians.
Building community and civic life, and preserving our historic inheritance	Y	N	N/A	Notes
Buildings and other project features are oriented toward public streets	Y			Townhouses built up to lot lines along Fairfax Boulevard and McLean Avenue. Community and retail buildings accessible from Fairfax Boulevard.
Uses the space between the building and the street creatively and to encourage public interaction	Y			Provides added public space and wide sidewalks along Fairfax Boulevard to contribute to a more inviting environment along this section of the Boulevard.
Minimal off-street surface parking			Both	Parking at south side of condominium building and in driveways. Internal streets have parallel parking. However, fairly large surface lots at both commercial buildings.
Buildings are conveniently and safely accessible on foot directly from the street	Y			
Includes space --interior or exterior -- for public use	Y			
Commercial and retail ground floors	Y			Townhouses along Fairfax Boulevard will allow ground-floor commercial use. Retail buildings on both sides of school building. School building may provide retail and community uses, although the plan and viability of the building for retail and community uses are still unclear.

Project's uses complement other uses in the area, and fill gaps in needed services, housing, and other uses		N		The school building will be the central non-residential use, but its viability for successful community and retail uses is unclear. The project will expand housing options by making available est. 75-80 smaller condominium units that will be initially priced in the high \$200,000s-\$350,000 range--a housing product in limited supply in the City currently. However, lack of rental units or units designated for affordability will put housing out of reach for many people who live and work in the City and have the biggest need for more housing options.
Minimizes disturbance to and enhances protection of historic properties and archaeological sites	Y			The applicant is making efforts to preserve elements of school building. However, we believe creating a more pedestrian-friendly environment by building up to the lot line along Fairfax Boulevard would be a better choice. We feel that the Wood building is not a valuable historic property, but the tree cover there should be preserved. The two buildings in that corner of the property could be razed and the space dedicated as parkland.
Contributing to a more environmentally sustainable pattern of growth	Y	N	N/A	Notes
Reduces the amount of impervious surface area on the site from existing conditions		N		
Includes innovative stormwater management measures such as green roofs, constructed wetlands, pervious paving, rain gardens, water cisterns		N		Increase in impervious surface and no efforts to preserve existing tree canopy. However, also provides needed stormwater management improvements, native landscaping and new grass channel along McLean.

Providing living options for diverse populations and needs	Y	N	N/A	Notes
Adds favorably to the balance of housing options in the city and surrounding areas	Y			The project will expand housing options by making available est. 75-80 smaller condominium units --a housing product in limited supply in the City currently. However, lack of rental units or units designated for affordability will put housing out of reach for many people who live and work in the City and have biggest need for more housing options.
Housing types and/or price levels are physically mixed in the project and/or in relation to the nearby neighborhoods	Y			