

February 26, 2025

Options for Oakton Testimony

Planning Commission Hearing

AT&T Comprehensive Plan Amendment, 2023-II-1F

ROB: Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan affecting the AT&T site. My name is Rob Means, and I live in Flint Hill Manor, just south of the property.

BARBARA: My name is Barbara Heard and I live off Vale Road in Oakton. We will testify on behalf of Options for Oakton.

ROB: Options for Oakton is an all-volunteer, grassroots community group that has advocated on behalf of Oakton residents on land use issues since the 1990s. Our Governing Committee represents a good cross section of Oakton residents, with a majority of the Committee living within a short walk from the AT&T site, and the rest living within a short bike or car ride. Our full membership includes residents from all parts of Oakton.

Redevelopment of the AT&T site is a once in a generation opportunity that will bring lasting changes to Oakton. We want to make sure that the development of the site makes Oakton a safer, more vibrant community and enhances the quality of life of all of Oakton's residents. We have to get this right, because there won't be another comparable development site in the foreseeable future.

BARBARA: Over the past two years, Options for Oakton has surveyed the community, held public meetings, attended County and applicant-sponsored community gatherings, and communicated with residents via email and social media in order to gather the concerns and expectations of Oakton residents. Through these efforts, we have a good sense for the wishes of our community. We've shared these results with the County and the applicant through numerous meetings of all stakeholders, including our Providence District Planning Commissioners, staff of Sup. Palchik, and both Planning and FCDOT staff.

When Planning Staff requested input from residents on the draft Comp Plan language, Options for Oakton submitted a report with our own recommendations. Based on our work with the community, we identified **six core needs** of the community that must be meaningfully addressed in any redevelopment of the AT&T Site. These are:

- Traffic Mitigation & Pedestrian Safety
- Parks & Natural Environment
- Community Infrastructure
- Third-Space Retail

- Affordable Housing
- Place-Making & Architecture

ROB: We are very grateful to the Planning Staff for their time and efforts in meeting with our group and incorporating some of our ideas in their report. We support many of the Staff's recommendations as they relate to affordable housing, place-making, third-place retail and pedestrian safety. We feel, however, that **as a whole**, the recommendations **still fall short of fulfilling** some of the community's core needs.

The following elements of the Staff recommendation must be amended before the draft Comprehensive Plan language can be approved:

1. **FIRST - Transportation and pedestrian safety** — The transportation infrastructure of the entire Oakton area is severely overwhelmed, a fact that Supervisor Palchik has also recognized. We fully support her plan to call for a transportation study of the Chain Bridge Road corridor through Oakton. Even the applicant's high-level transportation analysis shows numerous failing intersections and a lack of adequate pedestrian and bicycle facilities around the AT&T site. The same analysis shows very few traffic and pedestrian safety improvements in the area surrounding the AT&T site even if the applicant's current design is built, as documented in the slides included with our submission. Those of us who live in Oakton know how uncomfortable and dangerous it can be to walk in Oakton. Indeed, many of our members and neighbors have their own stories of accidents, near-misses, and terrible traffic encounters. It makes no sense, risks further fatal accidents, and undermines the Staff recommendations related to pedestrian and bicycle safety if we continue to redevelop Oakton without improving our transportation infrastructure first.
 - a. **Therefore, we recommend that pedestrian safety and transportation infrastructure improvements occur BEFORE or CONCURRENT with development of the AT&T site.**
2. **SECOND - Community infrastructure** — Even if and when transportation improvements are made, we are still not convinced that Oakton's infrastructure can handle the amount of density allowed by the draft plan language. We have been told by the applicant that overall viability of the site depends upon higher residential AND retail density, but no economic study has been published on this point and no hard numbers have been shared with the community despite our numerous requests. We also understand that because the Flint Hill Suburban Center is the smallest center in the County, other Suburban Centers do not provide an appropriate model for density and intensity comparisons. The Staff recommendations could have benefited from further studies of locations comparable to Flint Hill. Without further data, we can only conclude that the risks of increased density to Oakton's infrastructure are too high.
 - a. **Therefore, the proposed 1.0 FAR and up to 120,000 square feet of retail have not been demonstrated to be feasible for the AT&T site, and we recommend they be reduced.**

3. **THIRD - Park land and the natural environment** — Oakton residents and our children deserve safe, enriching, green spaces. The AT&T site has served as one of the only open spaces remaining for the surrounding neighborhoods, especially those south of the property that abut up against I-66. During the pandemic, the AT&T site became a refuge for those seeking the physiological and psychological benefits of being outside in an uncertain time. Borge Street Park, which borders the property to the east, is the only public park along Jermantown Road in what is one of the densest portions of Oakton. Its compact 3-acres include a small playground and a basketball court. An expansion of the park would align with the County's 2016 Parks Needs Assessment. That assessment recommended at least 5 acres of local parks for every 1000 residents. The latest County census data shows that Oakton's parks currently do not meet Oakton residents' needs – and that's before you factor in the addition of new residents in not only the AT&T site development, but also the new housing on sites on the other side of Chain Bridge Road. We also believe that, combined with pedestrian safety projects, an expansion of Borge Street Park and its amenities aligns with Fairfax County's 2023 Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Access Strategy, or PROSA, by giving Oakton residents access to a complete park within a safe 10-minute walk.
 - a. **Accordingly, to ensure that our community continues to have access to green spaces, we recommend that 4-5 acres of contiguous land reaching from the south of the AT&T site and connecting to Borge Street Park be preserved and improved for public use.** This space would be distinct from any urban parks requirements that the applicant would be required to meet under the Zoning Ordinance.

BARBARA: Options for Oakton has always aimed to be respectful, not just to the residents of Oakton but also to the property owner and the County. Redevelopment of the AT&T site will bring lasting changes to Oakton. It is our hope - better, our expectation - that the requests of those who live in Oakton, and especially those who live near the AT&T site, are incorporated generously into the Plan Amendments adopted by the Commission.

We ask that you amend the draft Comprehensive Plan language to further fulfill our community's core needs and create a vision that is appropriate and right-sized for our area.

Then, current and new residents alike will be able to enjoy Oakton for years to come.

Thank you for your time.