

March 10, 2025

Options for Oakton

Additional Testimony for the Record

RE: AT&T/ Oakton SSPA Nomination 2023-II-1F

Dear Planning Commissioners,

We appreciate your diligence and hard work on the Comprehensive Plan Amendments for the AT&T campus in Oakton. The community recognizes that development of this parcel presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring a well-balanced, vibrant new community space to Oakton. This is our one chance to get it right.

We are heartened by many of the Staff's laudable recommendations, particularly as they relate to place-making, park space and other community amenities. However, we remain concerned that the benefits of those recommendations will be undermined by **excessive strain** on our already overburdened infrastructure.

To expand on testimony we gave at the Commission's February 26 hearing, we are providing additional data and analysis to assist in your decision-making. Please reach out to our group with any questions.

Transportation & Pedestrian Safety Infrastructure. Currently, the staff has included plans for many improvements to Land Unit B, as well as some surrounding roads and sidewalks. Based on the applicant's Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA), we believe that transportation and pedestrian safety issues need to be improved before or concurrent with any development of the site in order to realize the vision of a vibrant community that all parties desire.

Here are our specific recommendations for the Comprehensive Plan:

- To avoid further traffic and pedestrian dysfunction, the Comp Plan should include language requiring **improvements to surrounding roads prior to or concurrent with any construction.**
 - The AT&T site **should not become an island of walkability amidst what has been described as a "traffic sewer."** Putting in some improvements prior to construction will lessen the likelihood that this happens. And it will lessen the dislocation residents will feel during construction. In other words, improving the

pedestrian experience just outside the site prior to or concurrent with new roads and sidewalks built on the site **will connect future development** with the rest of Oakton.

- o Pedestrian safety **improvements are urgently needed** in Oakton, regardless of AT&T site development. There are many residents of Oakton who would walk more frequently to destinations within Oakton, like the Post Office, Oakton Shopping Center and Hunter Mill Plaza, if they felt safe on our sidewalks and at our intersections. In addition, Oakton Elementary School children should be able to walk to school safely **with or without redevelopment** of the AT&T site.
- While we appreciate all creative ideas with regard to traffic congestion improvement and safety, **we believe that the Innovative Intersection has the potential to bring more problems to Oakton than it will solve.** It should not be included in the Comprehensive Plan. Here are some of the problems the intersection may create, and questions we have about it ---
 - o Oakton's Firehouse sits at the corner of Rosehaven Street and Jermantown Road. The current Comprehensive Plan recommends expansion of the firehouse. How will that expansion, and the future level of service, be impacted by the new traffic pattern? Furthermore, how will traffic trying to access I-66 through the new configuration be impacted by the firehouse?
 - o Traffic currently backs up on Jermantown Road during rush hour. That same amount of backup will occur if cars are going through Jermantown to turn left at Rosehaven. What will happen if traffic backs up into the Chain Bridge Road/ Jermantown Road intersection?
 - o Flint Hill Lower School sits to the west off Jermantown Road. The school pays for Fairfax County police service to stop traffic and let cars onto the roads during morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up so that those cars don't clog up the neighborhood in which the school sits. This will further impact the ability of other motorists to go through the Chain Bridge Road/ Jermantown Road intersection to turn left at Rosehaven and create new traffic clutter for Oakton.
 - o Finally, as Commissioner Cortina observed at the February 26 hearing, one cannot always account for human nature in planning. People will choose to take Borge Street to Flagpole Lane to White Granite Drive in an effort to avoid the new Innovative Intersection. This will create further traffic woes on smaller streets that provide the only access for residents living south of the site to reach their

homes. Traffic calming measures on Flagpole Lane might deter drivers from using this route.

Community Infrastructure (Residential and Non-Residential). The Comprehensive Plan is a unique document that provides Fairfax County residents with an opportunity to help shape a vision for their specific community. The Plan Amendment process gives applicants and residents alike the chance to build a policy vision --- a container --- for possible land uses on any given site. In the best of all worlds, the Comprehensive Plan language leads to vibrant, well balanced spaces that fulfill the needs of its residents without excessively impacting the County's infrastructure.

Current proposals for the AT&T site include a significant amount of retail. The only public data gathered during the SSPA process indicates that retail on the site will drive most of the impacts on our local infrastructure --- transportation, pedestrian safety, parks and open space, and safety.¹

Here are our specific recommendations for amending the Comprehensive Plan:

- Currently, Staff allows for up to 120,000 square feet for nonresidential uses in their Report. This amount includes both retail and other community uses, such as an arts center, community center, or other nonprofit use. We appreciate the acknowledgement that a vibrant community needs more than just consumer-based retail in order to thrive. Language to indicate **the maximum amount of retail square footage** within the 120,000 square feet set aside for nonresidential use should be included in the Comp Plan Amendment. Providing an outward limit on retail **will help guarantee that nonretail community uses are included** in any final development proposal.
- Language **requiring an economic study during the rezoning phase** on the appropriate amount of retail for this portion of Oakton should be included in the Comp Plan. No economic study concerning the site has been made public. This leaves the County and the community in the dark as to what might be appropriate. Comparisons with other mixed-use projects and proposals on suburban centers around the County offer little to no guidance since, as the Staff recognized in their Report on p. 12, "each Suburban Center is different and ... these differences should be taken into account in the planning process." Public economic data will assist Zoning staff when it comes time to determine the appropriate balance between retail and other non-residential uses.

¹ It bears repeating here that the applicant's traffic study, conducted by the firm Gorove Slade, found that up to 13,000 additional vehicle trips would occur on a Saturday, primarily generated by the retail on the site. Currently, since there is an office building on the property, Oakton experiences much less traffic on the weekends up and down Jermantown Road.

- The applicant's TIA has demonstrated that retail will be the primary driver of vehicle trips to and from the site. As such, we emphasize the importance of **phasing retail construction intelligently in relation to transportation improvements**. We ask that retail must NOT be allowed to open until transportation infrastructure and pedestrian safety improvements, including those designated in the Comp Plan, during Rezoning and also as a result of Supervisor Palchik's impending Transportation Study, are 100% completed. If residents must accept the disproportionate increase in traffic from retail on the site, then it is only fair and wise that any plans to mitigate that traffic be implemented first before the retail component is unlocked. As the primary driver of vehicle trips to and from the site, any retail construction should be phased along with concurrent transportation infrastructure and pedestrian safety improvements.

Parks & Green Space Infrastructure. For the past forty years, the AT&T site owners have been good neighbors to the residents living around the property. Neighborhoods to the south of the site have little access to open spaces other than the AT&T campus and the small Borge Street Park and playground. There has been a lot of testimony on the importance of access to the site, especially during the pandemic.

Every community needs green spaces, open spaces, parks and fields. Many studies² have been conducted on the mental and physical health benefits of having access to a park within a ¼ or ½ mile of one's residence. Fairfax County has recognized these benefits through the Parks Policy Plan and the recently adopted Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Access Strategy (PROSA).

At this time, Borge Street Park is the only park with a playground and sports facilities (basketball courts) serving the more than 5,500 residents living nearby. It is too small for current residents, let alone incoming residents, and must be expanded.

There is a disconnect between modern townhouse design that prioritizes zero lots over private green space, and the use of an Urban Parks model within the residential component of a suburban center. Residents end up with far less park space than they would have had in a suburban neighborhood setting. For a vibrant community to succeed on the AT&T property, there must be adequate green space to serve not only those who currently live in Oakton, but any new residents of the Flint Hill Suburban Center.

Here are our specific recommendations for the Comprehensive Plan:

² As an example, the World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended that "everyone, wherever they live" should have access to green space that is at least 2 hectares in size and within 300 m of their residence. That translates to approximately 4.5 acres of accessible green, open space within 1000 feet of their home. <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/345751> The Fairfax County Policy Plan contains similar acreage for local parks in a suburban setting – 5 acres per 1,000 residents.

- Currently, Staff has included a recommendation for a “at least one, consolidated common green,” on the AT&T site, but has indicated that all park decisions on the site would be governed by the Urban Parks Framework since the land sits within the Suburban Center. We support the **inclusion of language requiring at least one larger open space**. Given the small size of the Flint Hill Suburban Center, and the location of Borge Street Park on the arbitrary boundary between Suburban Center and Suburban Neighborhood, we would recommend that the Comp Plan specify that any expansion of Borge Street Park be **governed under the Local Parks Framework**³ instead. This would allow for more land to be allocated to a park expansion, and it would fulfill several County policy goals all at once ---
 - It fulfills **the Policy Plan goal to provide more playground space for residents**. Currently, the standard is 1 playground for every 2,800 residents.⁴ More than 5,500 residents live within a ½ mile of Borge Park playground, and there is no other public playground within that distance to serve the area.
 - It fulfills **PROSA goals for equitable access to complete parks** for all County residents.⁵ Expanding Borge Park and adding facilities to it will fulfill the goals of PROSA for Oakton residents living on and around the AT&T site.
 - It fulfills **the Urban Parks Framework**,⁶ which would then be applied to all other land on the AT&T site.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with further input regarding the AT&T site SSPA application. We believe that a balance of uses emphasizing quality of life and infrastructure improvements will benefit not only the current residents of Oakton, but future residents of the Flint Hill Suburban Center.

Sincerely,

Options for Oakton

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³ See the Parks & Recreation Policy Plan, Appendix 1 – Park Classification System: “In urban contexts, Local Parks should be located within walking distance (1/4 to 1/2 mile) from every residence. In these urban areas, access would be predominantly by foot or bike and the need for parking would be reduced or eliminated; it would be appropriate to provide limited on-street parking.”

<https://online.encodeplus.com/regs/fairfaxcounty-va-cp/doc-viewer.aspx#secid-333> The Appendix also

⁴ See the Parks & Recreation Policy Plan, Appendix 3 - Standards and Criteria for Establishment of Park and Recreation Facilities. <https://online.encodeplus.com/regs/fairfaxcounty-va-cp/doc-viewer.aspx#secid-329>

⁵ See the PROSA Strategy at 10.

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/sites/parks/files/Assets/documents/PROSA/prosa-strategy-document-092823-printer-friendly.pdf> .

⁶ See the Parks & Recreation Policy Plan, Appendix 2 – Fairfax County Urban Parks Framework.

<https://online.encodeplus.com/regs/fairfaxcounty-va-cp/doc-viewer.aspx#secid-334>