To CBC or Not to CBC?

**Background**

Fairfax County initiated a study of the Lincolnia neighborhood in 2015. The question our team was tasked with answering was whether this little corner of Fairfax could be the next community business center, or CBC, designated in the county.

Lincolnia is a racially and ethnically diverse 200-acre, mature community. The African-American and Hispanic populations comprise 33% and 38%, respectively of the total population, and 55% of its population is bilingual. Many of the retail stores reflect this diversity, with numerous international restaurants and a large Korean market.

Land use in Lincolnia is primarily residential, with it comprising 76% of the total land area and consisting of garden-style apartment complexes, some townhomes and a few older single-family homes. This area is bifurcated by Little River Turnpike, a major arterial, that connects I-395 and the City of Alexandria to Fairfax County. Lincolnia has a bustling commercial core with a mix of national retailers and local retailers and boasts a 5% vacancy rate. Retaining local retail when redevelopment occurs is important as it is difficult to accomplish. An existing senior center also serves the adjacent community.

Transportation is important because there is a major vehicular connection to I-395, as well as connections to the east and north along Beauregard Street and Lincolnia Road. Currently, bus routes provide the main mass transit alternative and future bus rapid transit (BRT) lines may come to this area. This area is potentially hazardous for pedestrians and new development could help fund needed infrastructure improvements.

**Team Approach**

- Meet with local team and County Supervisor
- Respond to questions posed by Department of Planning and Zoning regarding:
  - Corridor Planning/Regional Context
  - Connectivity
  - Affordable Housing, Social Equity and Economic Impact
- Research CBC definition in the county and in Virginia, identify other local developments as models, evaluate transportation connections, provide background on how to retain mix of housing and retail.

**Findings:**

**Corridor Planning/Regional Context**

- CBC – typically have 1 million sq.ft. of commercial space. Lincolnia currently has approximately 600,000 sq.ft. of retail and 130,000 sq.ft. of commercial space.
- Proffers would not be able to be used for new development without an approved small area comprehensive plan, such as one associated with a CBC. Legislation allows for a maximum 3.0 FAR for these special areas.
- Nearby redevelopment is planned at Landmark Mall, Beauregard Small Area Plan and Annandale CBC.
- Lincolnia could be modeled after these local examples: Towne Center at Laurel, Riverdale Park Station, St. Johns Town Center, Westwood Shopping Center.

**Connectivity**

- Predominance of north/south oriented arterials and neighborhood roads.
- Enhancing connectivity through the new CBC could increase “cut through” traffic.
Planned improvements: West End Transitway, Duke Street Corridor BRT, Fairfax County High Quality Transit Network
- Extend transit lanes from Landmark Mall and include bicycle and pedestrian amenities.
- Coordinate with Beauregard small area plan to strengthen connection to Mark Center and access for West End Transitway
- Pedestrian improvements – Connect Chambliss and Lincolnia Road missing links.
- Focus connections inward.

Affordable Housing, Social Equity, and Economic Development
- Best way to increase affordable housing is to increase the total supply of housing units.
- Market realities govern, all public policy priorities can’t be achieved in each new development.
- Mixed-income and affordable housing require Fairfax County government support and financing.
- CBC designation is not in of itself a catalyst for redevelopment.
- Data was presented to demonstrate how Fairfax fees and proffers today risk outpacing average rent. And furthermore, the relationship between fees and net rent is important as it shows a strong correlation to regional supply.
- Effective implementation facilitates, not force, market changes.
- There are several strategies for retaining existing businesses – create special zoning designation, affordable commercial linkage program, community ownership, development agreements.

Recommendation

The panel’s recommendation is yes, a CBC designation can be advantageous, but an understanding of the tradeoffs and implementation challenges must be fully considered.

The strengths and opportunities of a CBC include a well-articulated vision for the planning area; bringing a diversity of stakeholders to the table; a mechanism for obtaining greater public benefits; more comprehensive planning analysis, and the integration of redevelopment concepts into the plan’s area.

On the other hand, it must be emphasized that a CBC designation does not automatically catalyze redevelopment and today the market in this location may not support higher CBC densities. Similarly, new infrastructure requirements, costly “exactions”, and entitlement complexity could combine to hinder redevelopment.

As a result, particularly from an economic development perspective, the panel’s summary findings include:

- **Flexibility must govern**
- **Density should be a carrot, not a stick burdened with a costlier regulatory or proffer structure.**
- **A CBC designation is not, in and of itself, a catalyst for redevelopment.**
- **Effective implementation strategies will facilitate, not force, market changes.**

Panel Members:

- Allison Anolik, Environmental Planner/GIS Specialist, Louis Berger
- Hilary Goldfarb, Senior Vice President, Bozzuto Development
- Carlton Hart, Urban Planner, NCPC and Vice-Chair, DC Board of Zoning Adjustment
- Rick Liu, Economic & Development Specialist, Montgomery County Planning Department
- Zachary Williams, Attorney, Bean Kinney & Korman