



PROPOSAL for the COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION PROGRAM

Proposal Cover Sheet

SUBMITTED: June 18, 2004

COMMERCIAL AREA LOCATION/DESCRIPTION:

Lee Highway Commercial Corridor between Lorcom Lane and McKinley Street

SUBMITTED BY:

The Civic Associations (CA) of Donaldson Run CA, Leeway Overlee CA, Old Dominion CA, Tara-Leeway Heights CA, Yorktown CA

ADDRESS:

See Attachment 3 for email list of Civic Association Presidents and NCAC representatives.

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Date Received:

Staff Team Review:

Commercial Revitalization Program Proposal for Lee Highway

Identification & Purpose

Description of the Commercial Area in general:

The area of Lee Highway between Lorcom Lane and McKinley Street, approximately 1.5 miles long contains 3.64-million square feet of commercial space that partly serves adjacent neighborhoods and Arlington County as well as surrounding jurisdictions. This section of Lee Highway, a four-lane road controlled by VDOT serves both local traffic as well as commuter traffic. VDOT also controls Glebe Road, a north/south connector arterial road, as well as Old Dominion Drive.

Description of the proposal:

Several of the civic associations have joined together to request adequate funding to initiate a study of this section of Lee Highway as the first step for a revitalization and redevelopment plan similar to the efforts of the Columbia Pike Revitalization Initiative (adopted 2002) and the Lee Highway Cherrydale Revitalization Plan (adopted 1994).

Purpose of the proposal

As the backbone for a County adopted revitalization plan, this study would analyze the existing conditions and problems. Areas to be studied should include land use and zoning, pedestrian design, traffic and other transportation forms, economic analysis, feasibility, and development potential along this section of Lee Highway.

This effort should map out the scope and process for a future, more detailed revitalization plan. It should also address how a revitalization plan would meet the current goals and policies established by the County, such as encouraging safe pedestrian and bicycle traffic and public transit as well as automobile dominant environment, maintaining and fostering small local businesses, creating an environmentally sound community, traffic calming and safety measures and infrastructure renewal similar to the current efforts of the Cherrydale Revitalization project. Finally, it should identify funding mechanisms and opportunities for joint funding efforts with other private/public sources.

Benefits of Proposal

The prime commercial activity is retail, chiefly driven by local demand. Even without detailed economic analysis, it is clear to those familiar with the Lee Highway neighborhoods that much of the retail along this section does not fully meet the potential of serving the thousands of Arlington households living nearby.

A revitalization effort along this section of commercial corridor will not only improve the appearance, pedestrian friendliness and functionality of Lee Highway, it will improve the economic potential for the County. Retail vacancy currently hovers in the 1% range. There is clearly a demand for retail/service uses along the corridor. The selection of retail and services currently offered does not come near to adequately serving the needs of the communities up and down this commercial corridor.

There are four on-going traffic intersections in various stages of design and implementation. Each of the Lee Highway intersections: Old Dominion & Wakefield Street (new traffic signal), Edison Street (new traffic signal), George Mason Drive (left hand turn lane improvements) and Harrison Street (left hand turn lane) have not benefited from a more comprehensive traffic impact analysis of Lee Highway. There are also future plans in consideration for the renovation/relocation of the Fire Station # 8 (4835 Lee Hwy) located at Culpepper & Lee, which would benefit from a master plan effort for this section of Lee Highway.

Like the Cherrydale area and the Columbia Pike Corridor, significant redevelopment is unlikely to happen until the County takes a major interest in a revitalization plan and redevelopment of the infrastructure. In both Cherrydale and Columbia Pike, the County has witnessed increased redevelopment activity in response to the County's commitment to improve these commercial corridors.

Overall, the communities along this continuous commercial corridor of Lee Highway believe it is time for the County to make the same commitment and effort as made to Cherrydale and Columbia Pike.

Community Support

Existing community planning process for the commercial area

Seven civic associations include some section of this commercial corridor;
Donaldson Run, GlebeWood, John M. Langston (High View Park), Leeway Overlee,
Old Dominion, Waverly Hills, and Yorktown

Six of the seven civic associations have adopted Neighborhood Conservation plans, which are remarkably consistent in their approach to commercial revitalization of the Lee Highway corridor. Yorktown is currently in the process of updating their NC plan. Please see Attachment 1 for excerpts of the Neighborhood Conservation Plans.

The Neighborhood Conservation Plans currently accepted by the County are;

Donaldson Run: October 2000
High View Park (John Langston): February 1994
Leeway Overlee: March 1993
Old Dominion: November 2002
Waverly Hills: June 1999
Yorktown: February 1995 (currently being updated)

Current civic association interest and support for the proposal

Representatives of the Donaldson Run, John M. Langston, Leeway Overlee, Old Dominion, Tara-Leeway Heights, and Yorktown civic associations participated in the preparation of this proposal. In addition, local community members of the Planning Commission, Pamela Gillen and Transportation Commission, Chris Forinash, support this effort.

Commercial Area Description & Condition

General appearance of the commercial area

Mainly developed between the 1930s and the early 1960s, Lee Highway over the years has played an important commercial role in the county. Please see attachment 2 for dates and brief Lee Highway history. But over the years, the widening of Lee Highway has reduced the depth of commercially zoned land to the point that many parcels are undersized for modern commercial activity and economically feasible redevelopment. The widening has also reduced the pedestrian realm to a useless utility strip, eliminated space for transit shelters, created the most significant gap in north Arlington's bike network, and failed to improve traffic conditions for drivers.

Many buildings and sites are functionally obsolete and unsightly. Some merchants have made small improvements over the years, such as paint and awnings, but the overall appearance of the corridor is a deteriorating streetscape with unattractive buildings signage, access and parking. . There are numerous signs and overhead utilities, sidewalks in various widths and states of disrepair, small parking areas, and almost no greenery of any kind along the corridor. The community would like to have the problems with this section of corridor addressed. These problems include inadequate parking, poor service area, better quality retailers, improved and safer pedestrian access, renovated buildings and better buffer zones between the commercial and the single family residential areas.

An example of this section of Lee Highway is Garden City, located east of Lee and George Mason. Each shop is owned individually in a condominium with 30 units and 14 different owners. The owners have not concurred regarding site or building maintenance, making any redevelopments efforts a challenge. The property continues to be an eyesore as well as a rodent / trash problem for the community.

One high point of the corridor is the recently installed Halls Hill / High View Park gateway (a Neighborhood Conservation project) near the Heidelberg Pastry Shoppe. Another is the Lee Heights

shops, an excellent example of a well-managed, successful yet small locally tenanted shopping center featuring many well-known local favorites such as Pastries by Randolph Band Arrowine.

In the past 20 years, there have been only a few new developments such as Metro 29 Diner, Preston's Pharmacy, Chevy Chase Bank and Friendly's restaurant. These are all small single-use/single-site developments. In the early planning stages, existing residential (C-2 zoned) buildings at 4603 Old Dominion Drive are being converted under the recently adopted C-2 mixed use zoning guidelines.

There have been redevelopment/renovations projects, the largest being the Lee Harrison shopping center. After the closing of the Super Fresh grocery store, the center was renovated with a new look and re-merchandised with new tenants, the star anchor being the Harris Teeter grocery store with underground parking. The rest of the renovations projects have again been smaller individual use buildings such as the 2 banks located on the corner of Glebe and Lee. None of these projects has included any efforts to improve the streetscape or its infrastructure, such as lighting.

Pedestrian and/or vehicular traffic facilities

Arlington County's Lee Highway Corridor Analysis by Gorove/Slade Associates, Inc., dated April 6, 2004, addresses the Lee Highway commercial corridor between N. Buchanan and N. Edison Streets. It documents high pedestrian usage due to several bus stops, a school and various commercial uses, as well as difficult pedestrian crossings due to few gaps in the traffic patterns, speed of traffic, length and orientation of pedestrian crossings, and sight distance limitations. Neighborhood Conservation Plans for the surrounding neighborhoods document unsafe conditions for pedestrians as an impediment to usage of local shops.

The Gorove/Slade Lee Highway Corridor Analysis also documents excessive traffic delays during peak periods and traffic speeds exceeding the speed limit. In addition, Neighborhood Conservation Plans for the surrounding neighborhoods document difficulty entering and exiting the neighborhoods via Lee Highway and a high degree of neighborhood cut-through traffic by commuters attempting to avoid the Lee Highway corridor.

The closest Metro stations are Ballston and East Falls Church; however the # Metro bus line runs the length of Lee Highway and provide quality service. Other Metro and ART bus lines cross the corridor (Note: the Gorove/Slade study only addresses the Lee Highway commercial corridor between N. Buchanan and N. Edison Streets).

Residents/Visitors/Commuters Viewpoint

Lee Highway is a major commuter route through North Arlington. It experiences a high volume of traffic during peak times and of course some traffic for extended periods during the day and evening. In addition, the area traversed by N Glebe Rd., a major north-south route through the County. Most of the commercial establishments serve the local community, e.g., restaurants, barber and beauty shops, dry cleaners and tailors, hardware stores, printers, drug stores, and auto repair shops. Some of the commercial establishments also serve customers from outside the community, e.g., tattoo parlors, ethnic grocery stores, nightclubs and the well-known Metro 29 Diner.

DONALDSON RUN NC PLAN (2000)

- The single most important thing people felt would improve our local shopping was a pedestrian crosswalk or pedestrian crossover on Old Dominion Drive. The Neighborhood recommends further study of the pedestrian crossing situation on Old Dominion Drive near the Lee Heights shopping center. The neighborhood would like to see a more pedestrian-friendly situation with the addition of a crosswalk, crossing signals or a pedestrian walkover.

JOHN M. LANGSTON (HIGH VIEW PARK) NC PLAN (1994)

- There is a renewed interest in the community in reviving the economic vitality of High View Park and in having nearby businesses that are responsive and cater to the needs of the residents.
- Preserve and expand black-owned businesses along Lee Highway that cater to the needs of residents.
- High View Park also is interested in operating a community-based farmer's market. The market would be located in an underutilized public area, and would provide an avenue for the selling of homegrown produce and crafts, etc. A farmer's market in High View Park could provide employment and expanded income opportunities to residents; it would bring the community together; and it would increase the use of presently underused public spaces. The Arlington County Extension Service provides guidance to groups planning special events such as farmer's markets.

LEEWAY NC PLAN (1993)

- Some concern was expressed by both businessmen and local residents regarding the exterior appearance of some shops. Many of the buildings are old and in need of a facelift. A coordinated effort is needed to identify clusters of shops that would profit from modest renovation similar to that completed in recent years in the Westover shopping area and other neighborhood retail centers in Arlington. Any such effort should also examine current landscaping and adjacent commercial parking areas to see if a better configuration of this space could be achieved.
- County Staff should work with business owners, commercial property owners and Leeway residents to establish a revitalization strategy and action plan for the commercial areas.

OLD DOMINION NC PLAN (2002)

- In general, Old Dominion residents have expressed the opinion that the neighborhood shops serve community needs. However, residents have raised concerns that some shops, particularly the three tattoo parlors, may tend to drive away more family-friendly businesses.
- Investigate the feasibility of undergrounding utility lines in this commercial area. This would greatly improve the appearance of the area, as well as improve the visibility of signage.
- Extend the Lee Highway Cherrydale Revitalization Plan up Lee Highway, especially elements like the brick sidewalks and crosswalks, the Carlyle street lamps and tree plantings.
- Most local shops can be difficult to reach, as there is very little parking adjacent to the shops. Many shopfronts are right on Lee Highway, with minimal parking either behind the shops or on residential side streets. There is a large lot adjacent to the First Union bank at the intersection of Lee Highway and Glebe Road, but it is not used as much as it could be by neighboring shop patrons because of the difficulty in crossing both Lee Highway and Glebe Road. The signals at this intersection do not allow adequate time for pedestrians to cross. Adjust the walk and traffic signals at the intersection of Glebe Road and Lee Highway to increase the time allowed for pedestrians to cross. Install "yield to pedestrians in crosswalk" signs at the intersection of Buchanan Street and Lee Highway.

WAVERLY HILLS NC PLAN (1999)

- The neighborhood supports effective screening, including landscaping with evergreens and aesthetically attractive fencing, that can buffer negative impacts from lights, traffic, and to a limited extent, noise.
- Residential areas that abut commercial areas should be connected by pedestrian access, but should also be buffered where the adjacencies can create negative visual impacts.

YORKTOWN NC PLAN (1995)

- The neighborhood survey indicated that the Garden City Shopping Center and 7-11 store at North George Mason Drive and Lee Highway were considered eyesores and not commensurate with the general quality of the rest of the neighborhood and similar shopping areas in the County. Upgrading this commercial area was one of the highest priorities from the survey.
- Undertake a Business Conservation Project with the owners of the Garden City Shopping Center and adjacent business properties that would provide landscaping at the front of the shopping center and along North Lee Highway (replacing current sidewalk and concrete wall); move sidewalk adjacent to the shops; resurface and restripe parking lot; change entrance to include turning lanes; upgrade shops with awnings; provide uniform signage and paint; and provide additional landscaping and screening behind the commercial buildings.

Originally called the Georgetown Road, Lee Highway has been an important part of Arlington County's development.

"Lee Highway, also known as U.S. Highway 29, bisects the Leeway neighborhood. It began as a dirt road connecting the colonial towns of Falls Church and Georgetown. Its importance grew at the time of the Civil War when it helped to connect military forts defending Washington, D.C. It also served as a major farm-to-market route into the city. For many decades it was known as the Georgetown and Fairfax Road. As highway usage grew, its importance increased. In 1923, President Harding changed its name to Lee Highway and dedicated it as the initial segment of the nation's first transcontinental highway (U.S. Route 50) from the Capital to California. Though this U.S. highway routing was shifted to Arlington Boulevard in 1935, Lee Highway remained a well-traveled route. It was widened to a four-lane roadway through Leeway in the early 1960's."

Leeway NC Plan

"In 1918, community residents organized the County's first fire station (Fire Station #8, highly recognized today for its fast and diligent service to the County) which used a small two-wheel cart that took six men to pull over the rough roads and mud paths of those days."

High View Park NC Plan

Examples of building dates are:

- 4709 Lee Highway – CVS / VA ABC – 1956
- 4720 Lee Highway – Glebe Lee Shopping Center (Rite Aid) – 1962
- 4736 Lee Highway – Bank (was Moskey's Drug) – 1937
- 4763 Lee Highway – Ruffino's Spaghetti House – 1930
- 4770 Lee Highway – Alpine Restaurant – 1935
- 4807 Lee Highway – Moore's Barber Shop – 1940
- 4834 Lee Highway – McDonalds – 1962
- 5175 Lee Highway – Sana Jewelers (Garden City) – 1959
- 5210 Lee Highway – Prestige (Tops) Cleaners – 1956
- 5747 Lee Highway – Lee-Lex Auto Repair – 1951

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR SUPPORTERS OF THIS PROPOSAL

Attachment 3

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