

# Tysons Plan Worries Developers with Property not Near Planned Metro Stations

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A new plan for Tysons Corner has been in the works since 2005, but there is still a lot at stake in the final details for developers with money in the area. Who will pay for transportation and infrastructure improvements? What incentives will there be to build housing and prevent Tysons from becoming (err, remaining) an office park?

One concern stood out, however, Wednesday night when developers and commercial property owners lined up with residents and environmental advocates at a Fairfax County Planning Commission hearing to have a final say on the 233-page draft plan: the fate of developers whose property isn't within walking distance of one of the four planned Metro stations. Most everyone agrees that Tysons ought to be transformed into a "24/7 urban center" as the plan suggests, but developers of property without immediate Metro proximity were still feeling stomped upon. Consider these comments, delivered by developers, land-use attorneys and other industry leaders to the Planning Commission, via submitted testimony.

Stu Mendelsohn, partner at Holland & Knight and chairman of the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce, testified early in the evening and laid things out for everyone, saying "the question is how to transform Tysons Corner into a vibrant, world-class urban center, not whether."

"However," he continued, "the chamber believes that without an economically feasible plan, there will be no redevelopment to debate over."

Taxes and costs associated with building in Tysons, he said, "will have a chilling effect on any development," if property owners who aren't near Metro aren't given greater opportunities for density.

"The business community fears that if the development conditions are not significantly adjusted, redevelopment in Tysons Corner will no longer be economically feasible, particularly in the non-transit-oriented development areas," he said.

Mendelsohn wasn't alone.

"There must be a better balance between the numerous community-wide benefits sought from the developers by Fairfax County and the corresponding density necessary to help provide real risk-adjusted financial returns necessary to incentivize new investment," said Keith Turner, senior vice president for the largest property holder in Tysons, McLean-based WestGroup. The combination of development requirements and density restrictions in areas that aren't within immediate access of one of the coming Metro stations -- including much of WestGroup's property along Jones Branch Drive -- "are too costly and too restrictive and will hamper the redevelopment of Tysons and stall the economic engine of Virginia," Turner said.

A smaller property owner also complained about the prospects for properties that are less Metro-accessible. Don McIlvaine, owner of seven acres at 8500 Tyco Rd., said affordable-housing requirements, height limits and other requirements put the plan "a long way from the original marching orders of 'provide a bold vision for the future of Tysons.' "

McIlvaine's property is just over a quarter-mile from the planned Metro station known as Tysons West. "Good luck and congratulations, you've missed the target in promoting redevelopment in the

[transit-oriented development] districts outside the quarter-mile ring and which incidentally contain 75 percent of all TOD area," he said.

Another sticking point -- who will build housing? -- may not be much easier to solve. Larry Murphy of Wells Fargo Advisors, a board member of the Vienna-Tysons Regional Chamber of Commerce, said traffic was a "major, if not the primary, issue on the minds of our businesses and residents" and that the way to address that was to build amenity-rich neighborhoods near the Metro stations.

But having property classified as best for residential didn't sit so well, even for developers with highly Metro-accessible property. An attorney for developer the Matan Cos., G. Evan Pritchard, argued that the developer's four-acre site at 1750 Old Meadow Rd., despite being about a quarter of a mile to the planned Tysons East station, was better suited for an office building. Said Pritchard: "While we understand the benefits of residential developments, we believe our property is not well suited to residential use."