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Visions of the Future as Spaces of Engagement: The Political Economy of Transit-Oriented Redevelopment in Tysons Corner, VA

By Avery Bowron

ABSTRACT

In the 1950s, Tysons Corner was a rural area of Fairfax County, VA. Today, it is the nation's 12th largest collection of commercial and office space, and the textbook example of “Edge City” suburban sprawl. Throughout its history, development in Tysons closely resembled Logan and Molotch's growth machine thesis. Over the past two years, a radically different future has been planned for Tysons with the arrival of the Dulles Metrorail and the drafting of a new Comprehensive Plan. This paper analyzes the new Comprehensive Plan through its series of drafts, public comments, and coverage in the media in order to situate it within the political economy of place framework. What allowed for such a dramatic shift in vision? Perhaps more critically, what role has the growth machine played in shaping this new vision? This case study demonstrates that even in (perhaps *especially* in) cases which represent major shifts in vision, the growth machine is likely to play a central role in shaping the extent and the boundaries of that vision. Furthermore, it examines the critical role that outside investment plays in revitalizing the growth machine, and positions the negotiation of these investments as spaces of engagement for both use and exchange value interests. In the end, this paper finds that in order to promote alternative visions for growth, one must become a knowledgeable agent, capable of manipulating the development process.

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Introduction

Suburban sprawl is a highly controversial subject in urban analysis. Conventional wisdom holds that suburbia exploded during the postwar years as an unavoidable consequence of pent up demand for housing and the emerging dominance of the automobile in American life. In reality, the suburban forms that came to dominate the American landscape were the result of careful planning and intentionally crafted policies designed to shape the real estate market in pursuit of particular visions of economic growth. The smart growth movement emerged as a reaction to the problems associated with this form of development: sprawl and automobile dependence associated with low density, a loss of open space and the decay of central city neighborhoods. This movement calls for the integration of land use, transportation, and economic planning to promote compact, mixed use and pedestrian friendly urban environments that allow for less automobile dependent lifestyles. While the smart growth movement has had mixed results in practice, its goals and rhetoric remain central to many New Urbanist and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) initiatives around the country.

Tysons Corner, Virginia is representative of a typical “edge node” (Hayden, 2004) or “edge city” (Garreau, 1992), having grown from a small filling station at the intersection of two country roads in the 1950s to one of the nation's largest urbanized areas today. With well over 46 million square feet of commercial space, Tysons has a landscape shaped by highways and dotted with office parks, shopping malls, and parking lots. However, the same actors that led Tysons to where it is today now envision a radically different future of compact, high-density, mixed-use,

pedestrian friendly TOD districts surrounding Metrorail stations and an interconnected network of new public and open spaces. This vision is codified in a new Comprehensive Plan being drafted by the Fairfax County Planning and Zoning Committee. What allowed for such a radical shift in vision for the future of Tysons Corner and what can be learned from the process which led to this change?

Utilizing and expanding upon the political economy of place framework (Logan and Molotch, 1987), this paper demonstrates that the developments in Tysons Corner, like the development of most American suburbs, were the result of intentional and strategic actions by those interests that constructed them, and were by no means inevitable. Because this redevelopment plan is only in the planning phase, few conclusions can be made yet about its success or failure in achieving the goals it sets out to realize. However, Fairfax County's process of drafting the new Comprehensive Plan, with its public comment sessions, annotated drafts, easily available presentations and impact studies, provides a relatively transparent view of the development process at work. Critically, this case demonstrates the ability of major infrastructure projects to structure future development in a place. Finally, the case also demonstrates how, given proper institutions (i.e. public commenting), a major investment in a place can serve as a space of engagement for negotiation between use value interests (i.e. residents, employees) and developers seeking to earn a profit.

The rest of this essay is organized as follows. First, I survey the literature surrounding urban sprawl, Smart Growth, and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in order to contextualize the motivation for this redevelopment plan. Second, I

outline the methodology that I use in analyzing the drafting of Tysons Corner's new Comprehensive Plan. Third, I discuss the political economy of place perspective, and its relevance for the understanding of suburban development patterns in Tysons Corner. Then, I examine the details of the most recent draft Comprehensive Plan, explore the different stakeholders involved in the process of drafting it, and explain the major contentious issues involved. Finally, I draw conclusions from this analysis about the broader relevance of this case for the political economy of place and growth machine theory.

Smart Growth vs. Urban Sprawl

The vision presented by the Tysons Land Use Task Force is deeply rooted in the theory of Transit-Oriented Development and Smart Growth. Furthermore, the pedestrian environment prescribed in the draft Comprehensive Plan draws heavily from the traditional neighborhood design principles of the New Urbanism movement. This section explores relevant literature to provide a basic understanding of the wider context in which this redevelopment plan has been drafted.

The contemporary debate surrounding urban sprawl centers on three major questions. First, is urban sprawl actually as problematic as its detractors claim? Second, what are the causes of urban sprawl? And finally, do Smart Growth, New Urbanism, and TOD actually counteract sprawl as their proponents claim?

A wide range of research (Holcombe, 2004; Handy, 2005; Ellis, 2002) agrees on the fundamental components of urban sprawl: Over the latter half of the

twentieth century, urban areas became increasingly dispersed in low-density, automobile dependent development patterns that have consumed large amounts of open space. At the same time, major urban centers experienced economic decline. Traffic congestion is a major concern in most major metropolitan areas. Finally, there are significant negative externalities associated with automobile use that raise questions about the desirability of contemporary urban forms and dominant transportation patterns in the United States (Parry et al., 2007). Smart Growth emerged as a policy response to these prevailing trends.

New Urbanism is one manifestation of Smart Growth ideas that places a large emphasis on the role of neighborhood design in structuring both the kinds of lifestyles that can be lived in an area as well as those that are most likely to be lived (Ellis, 2002). Transit-Oriented Development is often a component of both Smart Growth and New Urbanist development strategies that refers to the coordination of land use regulations and mass transit networks so that high density development is concentrated in areas accessible to pedestrians and transit users. Taken together, Smart Growth, New Urbanism, and Transit-Oriented Development all promise to help ameliorate the problems associated with sprawl, and they have begun to face critical scrutiny over these claims.

Holcome (2004) argues that not only are the “problems” associated with sprawl overblown, but that the increased density advocated by New Urbanism would likely result in worse outcomes. Handy (2005) concludes that new highway capacity now tends to influence where growth occurs in a metropolitan area, rather than increasing the overall level of growth. Furthermore, she finds that light-rail

transit can in fact encourage higher density development under certain conditions and that while New Urbanist developments may not guarantee a less automobile dependent lifestyle, they do make it easier for those who want to drive less to do so. Levine and Inam (2004) find that regardless of their efficacy at combating sprawl, “alternative” developments¹ are quite popular and sell at a premium over comparable homes in “regular” developments. Finally, they survey developers across the country about the perceived market for “alternative” developments and find that in all regions demand exceeds supply. Critically, zoning regulations are cited by a majority of developers as the primary obstacle to further development of these projects.

The question of whether or not the proposed TOD redevelopment plan in Tysons Corner will successfully reduce traffic congestion and achieve a pedestrian friendly environment remains uncertain and goes beyond the scope of this paper. Because the plan remains in the drafting phase and relies heavily on private developers to provide much of the infrastructure investment, there is no way to know if it will be successful as currently envisioned. Regardless, it is important to establish that the desirability, efficacy, and rhetoric of Transit-Oriented Development are taken for granted by nearly everyone involved in the process.

Methodology

The remainder of this paper shifts to focus first on the historical development of Tysons Corner, and then the drafting and public comment processes that shaped

¹ Their definition of an “alternative” developments aligns closely with the characteristics of New Urbanist and Transit-Oriented Developments.

this new vision, in order to better understand how such a vision came to be adopted and what its significance is for the development process itself. For this analysis of the Comprehensive Plan draft and the forces that have shaped it, I examine media accounts in *The Washington Post*, the four Comprehensive Plan drafts themselves, and the public comments submitted to the Fairfax County Planning and Zoning Committee. I use the media stories to provide background information on the motivation and rationale for the process itself. I use the public comments to identify the different stakeholder groups that have been active in the process and the issues on which they base their advocacy. Finally, I use the Comprehensive Plan drafts to track the changes from draft to draft in order to see which groups have had an identifiable influence over the draft language. However, it is necessary to first outline the political economy of place framework and its relevance for understanding both the history of development in Tysons Corner and the current project of re-envisioning the future of that development.

The Political Economy of Place and Structuration Theory

The political economy of place perspective begins with the fundamental realization that place, despite the efforts of place entrepreneurs, does not and will never behave like an ideal commodity (Logan and Molotch, 1987). This arises from the dual nature of place, that is, its generation of use values (shelter, employment, leisure, psychological attachment, etc.) and the exchange value it provides as a commodity (through subdivision, real estate development, home value appreciation, etc.). The uniqueness of place is the result of its historically contingent nature

(Pred, 1984) and the peculiarity that the use value of any given place is intimately interconnected with an individual's social and psychological connections to that place. The exchange value of place is a function of its use value, its location within the network of local capital networks and transportation systems, and the limitations placed upon its use through government regulation (Logan and Molotch, 1987).

Furthermore, everyone who has access to a place can derive use value from that place, but only property owners can derive exchange value from place. Thus, use and exchange values often come into conflict with one another, and the social construction of place can be understood as the result of a dialectical struggle between use value and exchange value interests within the context of government and corporate decision-making which creates winners and losers by determining zoning regulations, providing critical infrastructure, and locating major employment centers (Logan and Molotch, 1987).

A central concept in this understanding of place evolution is the relative fixity of relationships to place. For example, homeowners and local businesses have relatively fixed relationships to place due to the importance of their existing social networks. Conversely, national and multinational businesses often have quite tenuous relationships to place and use this relative mobility to their advantage in extracting incentives to locate in particular places. Real estate developers, because of their dependence on growth in particular places (the ones they own), have a strong interest in attracting growth, and form coalitions with other businesses and institutions that share a common interest in local growth (Logan and Molotch, 1987). These growth machines play a central role in the development of place.

Allan Pred (1984) locates the historically contingent nature of place within the context of structuration theory. Human agency is embedded in social structure and situated in place. Structure and place have a dual nature: They are both the medium and outcome of human agency and social practice. Therefore, places and social structures simultaneously constrain the agency of human actors and are constructed by the social practices and physical actions of those very same people. Although structures and places tend to reinforce themselves through this process of social reproduction, it also presents an opportunity to alter those structures and shape the form of those places through the exercise of human agency. Thus, each place can be viewed as a fundamentally human product, shaped by its spatial context (geographic, economic, demographic, etc.) and the historical influence of those people and social structures which have shaped its development over time.

Within this framework, leaders of both growth machines and use value interests can be seen as knowledgeable agents, each constrained by the structures of their particular time and place, but concomitantly working toward and lobbying for advantageous changes in those structures, institutions, and places from which they obtain use and exchange values. It is important to note that not all people have equal agency, and that while knowledge of how places are constructed and social structures function can allow effective action by anybody, social privilege and power dynamics tend to correlate with a higher degree of influence and therefore are generally self-reinforcing (Pred, 1984).

Scale and the Political Economy of Place

Scale is a critical factor in understanding how the political economy of place operates, how growth coalitions are formed, and how successful political organization occurs. When thinking about scale and politics, it is useful to conceptualize political engagement through spaces of dependence and spaces of engagement (Cox, 1998). Spaces of dependence refer to the interconnecting network of places, institutions, and social structures from which a political actor (a person, organization, or institution) draws their support and livelihood. Spaces of engagement refer to the interconnecting network of places, institutions, and social structures which a political actor engages in their efforts to maintain, enhance, and protect the spaces of dependence on which they depend. Understanding political mobilization and the development process, then, requires an understanding of the connections between political actors and place in the broadest sense of the word, the different scales at which they may engage with particular issues, and the ways in which political coalitions emerge and collaborate across scales (Cox, 1998).

For example, local developers may partner with national lobbies or higher levels of government (i.e. state, federal) in order to put pressure on local zoning boards. Furthermore, local use value interests may connect with national organizations or relate their local struggle to issues of broader significance in order to garner support for their cause. Alternatively, federal initiatives may require the cooperation of local actors to provide legitimacy for and help implement major infrastructure projects. Again, it is important to note the role which political connections, particularly interscalar ones, play in constraining or enabling an actor's

ability to shape their spaces of dependence. Furthermore, as an actor's space of dependence broadens, it becomes less fixed to specific places, and therefore more insulated from the externalities of continued growth. This understanding of spatial politics, along with the process of structuration, helps illuminate the battlefield on which use value interests compete with exchange value interests to shape the construction of places.

The Political Economy of Growth in Tysons Corner, Virginia

Tysons Corner has over 46 million square feet of commercial space, twelfth most of all urbanized areas in the United States, more than downtown Miami or San Antonio (Garreau, 1992). The landscape is shaped by highways and dotted with office parks, shopping malls, and parking lots. Tysons Corner is the opposite of a bedroom community, with a population that grows by over 100,000 each morning, and shrinks again at the end of the work day. However, this was not always the case. Less than 70 years ago, Tysons Corner consisted of little more than a livery stable and a small filling station at the corner of two country roads, surrounded by farmland and wooded areas (Hayden, 2004). Was this growth inevitable? Was it a case of value-free development, shaped only by the impartial logic of a free market? No. While growth of some kind was likely inevitable in Tysons Corner, its form and extent have been actively shaped by the actions of local developers, interstate highway construction, federal tax policy, rulings of the Virginia state supreme court, and the activism of historic preservationists, among many others. Critically, examining the development of Tysons Corner reveals that, like all places, it was the

product of intentional choices, and as such, its current form was not inevitable and is not permanent.

Taken together, the works of Hayden (2004) and Garreau (1992) present a detailed picture of Tysons Corner and the forces which shaped its development. Of particular importance was the construction of the I-494 Capitol Beltway, paid for by funds from the 1956 Interstate Highway Act (Hayden, 2004) and routed by Til Hazel, the man who would subsequently become one of the driving forces behind development in Tysons Corner (Garreau, 1992). Furthermore, the explosion of commercial office and retail space constructed in Tysons Corner was heavily subsidized by federal tax dollars covering “accelerated depreciation”² for newly constructed, revenue generating buildings through the 1954 Internal Revenue Code until the passage of the 1986 Tax Reform Act (Hayden, 2004). Finally, development in Tysons Corner was profoundly shaped by the prevailing trends in American life and the increasingly globalized information economy.

More than any single individual, John T. (Til) Hazel has personally shaped the present day form of Tysons Corner (Garreau, 1992). Hazel grew up working on his family’s farm in nearby Arlington County, and after graduating from Harvard Law School, took a job negotiating the condemnation of property for the construction of the I-494 Capitol Beltway corridor. Driven by a pro-growth ideology and a belief that all land is meant to be used to serve human needs, Til Hazel’s law firm represented many of the early developers in Tysons Corner. Later, Hazel himself became one of the area’s most prominent developers. Celebrated by

² Accelerated depreciation dramatically increased turnover in commercial real estate and provided a massive implicit subsidy for new commercial developments at the urban fringe. For a more complete explanation, see Hayden (2004).

colleagues and vilified by his opponents, Hazel is famous for winning every zoning law case he contested in the Virginia Supreme Court. His detractors point to the time he clear cut 26 acres before it could be put aside for a park, or the time he “bulldozed one tree a day in a pristine wilderness, in protest of a government delay” (Garreau, 1992: 352). Throughout his career, Til Hazel appeared invincible, and his continual pursuit of growth and development in Tysons Corner and greater Fairfax County made him an extraordinarily wealthy man. In every sense of the term, Hazel can be seen as a knowledgeable agent, using his deep understanding of local land markets, zoning law, political connections, and experience in routing the Beltway to pursue his personal goals for the development of Tysons Corner.

However, in an example of the ways in which political actors can “jump scales” (Cox, 1998) to successfully oppose a project which they would not be able to prevent through local action alone, Hazel was “defeated”³ in 1988 by a historical preservation group when he attempted to construct a shopping mall and office park over part of an important Civil War battlefield. In response, a “Save the Battlefield Coalition” formed, made up of local residents who cared deeply about the history of the Civil War. By connecting with a savvy national marketing group, they produced an advertisement that linked the destruction of this open space with the destruction of American national heritage. The advertisement proclaimed: “Without your support, the soldiers who died at Manassas will be rolling over in their graves,” and displayed an image of bulldozers moving earth in an open field. This provocative statement caught the attention of the national media and eventually led to the land

³ While he was not able to develop the land, the federal government paid Hazel \$81 million after he had purchased it for \$11 million just two years earlier.

being purchased by the national government and added to the adjacent national monument after funding was arranged by a Senator from Arkansas (Garreau, 1992).

This summary of Tysons Corner's historical development is by no means complete, but it does illustrate how the political economy of place framework can be used to understand the forces that shaped the development of Tysons Corner. Within this framework, the development that occurred at Tysons Corner can be seen as a result of the intentional actions of members of a growth machine (i.e. Til Hazel and other developers). The actions of these developers were structured by their physical location and the social, economic, and legal realities which they faced. Because development in Tysons Corner has been primarily non-residential, there were few residents to attach strong use values to this place, and exchange value interests played a dominant role in shaping Tysons Corner.

Perhaps the single greatest factor in structuring the development in Tysons Corner was its location at the intersection of the Capitol Beltway and the Dulles Access Toll Road. Both of these highways were major infrastructure investments made by institutions operating at a supralocal scale (i.e. Federal and State Departments of Transportation), and their location at Tysons is what allowed for its rapid development. It was not until after the construction of the Beltway that the first major regional mall was located at Tysons, and the physical form of development in Tysons was heavily automobile-oriented from that point forward. For the first two decades after major development began, developers received substantial federal subsidies for newly constructed commercial buildings through the doctrine of accelerated depreciation. Even after the end of accelerated

depreciation, Tysons Corner remained one of the fastest growing job centers in the United States, with a heavy focus on the emerging technology and private defense contracting industries (Garreau, 1992; Hayden, 2004).

During the 1990s, Tysons Corner became increasingly plagued by traffic congestion (Irwin, 2003) and, with the beginning of planning for the construction of a Metrorail line connecting Washington with Dulles Airport (running through Tysons) Fairfax County developers began considering the possibility of adopting a new vision for the future of Tysons (Shear, 2001). In 1994, with the planning for the Dulles Metrorail line underway, Fairfax County adopted a new Comprehensive Plan that envisioned a gradual shift toward higher density and increasingly pedestrian friendly development. However, this plan made no real attempt to codify this vision within the zoning regulations and explicitly related it to the arrival of Metrorail. When the Metrorail project hit a series of obstacles, growth patterns in Tysons remained unchanged for the following fifteen years (Whoriskey, 2001). Remarkably, during that same time just about everyone with an interest in Tysons Corner came to agree in principle on a significantly more radical effort to realize that vision, if not on the specifics of exactly how it should be implemented (Lewis, 2005). The following section of this paper explores this vision's application in the Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan drafting process, details the major stakeholders involved in this process and the points of contention between them, and locates this process of negotiation as a space of engagement within the political economy of place framework.

Transforming Tysons: The New Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan

On May 23, 2005, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors established the Tysons Coordinating Committee, which would later become the Tysons Land Use Task Force, and tasked it with updating the 1994 Comprehensive Plan. A Comprehensive Plan, often produced by municipal or local governments and planning committees, is a planning document meant to guide development in that place over a set period of time (often 10 years or more). A Comprehensive Plan plays a dual role as both a comprehensive vision for what a place will become and as a legal codification of the rights and responsibilities that developers face within that jurisdiction. Because any deviations from the zoning code must be approved against the Comprehensive Plan, it plays a major role in structuring the form that future growth takes. As such, the drafting of a Comprehensive Plan becomes a natural space of engagement in which developers actively lobby to secure their future development rights and use value interests seek concessions from developers.

Over three and a half years, the Tysons Land Use Task Force, which evolved from the Tysons Coordinating Committee to include 36 members representing Tysons Corner business leaders, nearby residents, and public officials, held hearings, consulted with interested parties, and produced an integrated vision of Tysons Corner as a “mixed-use urban center with a five-fold increase in residents, housing for moderate income workers, aggressive energy and environmental commitments, parks and open spaces, protection for surrounding communities, and a shift from cars to a complete multi-modal transportation system friendly to pedestrians and to bicycles” (Tysons Land Use Task Force, 2010). In December

2008, the Fairfax County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to approve the overall vision and pass it along to the Planning and Zoning Committee to draft the actual Comprehensive Plan, a process which is still ongoing today.

Currently, the Comprehensive Plan language is between its fourth and final drafts, and is scheduled for final approval in June 2010. The drafting process began with the vision and areawide recommendations proposed by the Land Use Task Force and includes input from the planning committee staff, public design charettes, outside impact analyses, and testimony from developers, private citizens, and other interest groups at the dozens of public comment hearings that have been held. The table below outlines the major stakeholder groups that stand to be directly impacted by new development at Tysons Corner, and a succinct description of their interests, as articulated through public comments, media coverage, and the Zoning and Planning Committee itself.

| Stakeholder | Description | Interests |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Fairfax County | Responsible government entity | Responsible for the planning process itself. Stands to collect billions of dollars in new tax revenues. Owns very little land and wants private developers to fund most of the necessary infrastructure improvements and provide the land for public parks, civic structures, and the proposed grid of streets. Acts as mediator between planners, citizens, and developers. |
| Current landowners / developers | Major names include Til Hazel, Ted Lerner, and Gerald Halpin, but a variety of real estate investment trusts own the majority of land in Tysons | Their ability to earn future profits depends on the level of density they convince the planning committee to allow. Have expressed major concerns about the number of responsibilities forced on the private sector by the current draft Plan. Very supportive of the overall conceptual vision. |
| Current Tysons residents | Small population, centered on gated condominiums (i.e. The Rotonda, The Preserve) | Private gated communities don't want street expansion or sidewalks near their properties. Generally supportive of the overall vision, and some individual residents expressed strong support for the pedestrian and cycling improvements. |
| Nearby towns and subdivisions | Predominantly residential municipalities and homeowners associations (i.e. McLean, Vienna, Pimmit Hills, etc.) | This group has been the most ambivalent towards the new vision. There is a heavy dose of skepticism about the ability of Transit-Oriented Development to avoid increased traffic congestion. Generally voice support for the overall vision, but want to ensure their tax dollars are not subsidizing private developer profits. |
| Current Tysons businesses | Majority of tenants are leasing property owned by a developer | Current lease holders have been largely absent from the public comment process. Except in special circumstances (i.e. car dealerships), they are unlikely to be significantly impacted by redevelopment. |
| Environmental groups | Sierra Club, Greater Tysons Green Civic Association | Advocates for strong requirements for new developments (provision of parklands, advanced stormwater systems, LEED design requirements, pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure, limited parking, etc). |

Data Source: Stakeholders and positions characterized from the 59 public comments submitted to Planning Committee between January and March 2010.

Contentious Issues in the Draft Comprehensive Plan

The growth machine thesis asserts that development is structured by a competition between use and exchange value interests. While this is certainly true in the case of the drafting of Tysons Corner's new Comprehensive Plan, the relationships between use and exchange values are complicated by the fact that, particularly for residential developments, use values significantly impact exchange values. This can be seen in the negotiations over draft language on developer responsibilities. Every developer that submitted a public comment agreed with the proposed vision in principle, and many even agreed with the proposed structure in which private developers are responsible for the provision of the land needed for these structures and open spaces. However, many of the complaints registered in the public comment period were from the specific developers whose land was targeted in the specific district-level land use recommendations. Each developer would like to benefit from the public amenities provided in the Comprehensive Plan, but they would prefer that somebody else pay for it. This dynamic is characteristic of the process in general, but it is helpful to explore the nuances involved with each major issue that has proven controversial. The major issues that have been contested during the drafting of the new Comprehensive Plan can be categorized into three distinct categories: development standards and responsibilities, density and overall development, and development phasing mechanisms.

Development Standards and Responsibilities

At the heart of the new Comprehensive Plan is a compromise between use

and exchange value interests from Tysons Corner. In exchange for the provision of a set of public spaces, an urban grid of streets, affordable housing, and meeting Leadership in Energy Efficiency and Design (LEED) standards for all new buildings, developers are granted higher density development rights in the zoning code. While this is a simple trade off in theory, the exact balance struck will play a major role in structuring both the form that future development takes in Tysons as well as the extent to which developers can earn profits from the arrival of the Metrorail. In fact, the realization of the new vision for Tysons Corner is entirely dependent on the ability of this compromise to work successfully, and this makes it a natural space of engagement for both use and exchange value interests.

The fourth draft Comprehensive Plan envisions an extensive network of open spaces and parkland, as well as new public facilities (i.e. schools, a library, etc.) in each district. This is one of the plan's many challenges, as Fairfax County owns very little land in Tysons Corner. As currently drafted, the new Comprehensive Plan requires the provision of these facilities within the district level recommendations, providing density bonuses and transferrable development rights to compensate private developers for the cost of providing the space necessary for these public amenities. For example, if a developer had a five acre plot of land, but the Comprehensive Plan called for the provision of a two acre park on that property, then the developer could either build additional floor area on the other three acres or sell the right to that much floor area to another developer for a nearby property. Alternatively, if the plan called for the provision of a public library on that property, then the library could be included as part of a mixed-use development and the floor

area for the library would not count toward that property's floor area allowance (Fourth Draft, 2010). Despite these incentives and transferrable rights, many of the landowners whose property is designated for a park or public facility in the draft have requested that this designation be made "conceptual," and have argued that provision of these public amenities will make the cost of redevelopment prohibitively expensive. However, the Sierra Club and many individual citizens submitted comments in support of these requirements, arguing that developers can afford the costs due to the windfall profits they are expected to earn with the arrival of the Metrorail (Public Comments, 2009-2010). So far, the Planning and Zoning Committee has remained firmly behind the need for such requirements, because they view them as the only way to obtain the land and floorspace necessary to achieve the new vision (Staff Report, 2010).

Constructing an urban grid of streets is another central feature of the new vision which has become a point of contention during the public comment process. As currently drafted, the Comprehensive Plan lays out a conceptual street map designed to transition Tysons Corner from a landscape of suburban office-parks to a more compact urban form. The grid of streets is seen as necessary in order to disperse traffic throughout Tysons and provide alternative transportation routes (i.e. bicycling, walking) within Tysons (Fourth Draft, 2010). However, the proposed street widths have been questioned by developers and local residents alike, but for very different reasons. For example, while many residents and some developers have expressed support for bicycle lane requirements, other residents have expressed concern that the proposed widths of major streets (71ft-110ft) would be

counterproductive with respect to the encouragement of a pedestrian friendly environment. On the other hand, many developers have argued that the proposed street widths, when combined with the new grid of streets, would reduce the developable area on their properties such that it would no longer be profitable (Public Comments, 2009-2010). Again, the Planning and Zoning Committee has stood its ground with the proposed grid of streets because of its centrality to the Comprehensive Plan's vision (Staff Report, 2010).

Aside from zoning density, no issue has generated more comments than the Comprehensive Plan's requirements for the provision of affordable housing units in new developments. As currently drafted, the Comprehensive Plan requires 20 percent of all new residential units to be affordable based on proportions of area median income. In return, developers are granted a 20 percent density bonus. Furthermore, non-residential developments are required to contribute \$3.00 per square foot toward an affordable housing trust fund. Finally, there is an explicitly stated preference for affordable units to be integrated with regular market rate units, but an allowance for off-site provision and/or the aggregation of affordable units if it provides a significant cost savings (Draft Four, 2010). Many developers have expressed a concern that the affordable housing requirement is too onerous, arguing that it should be set at the same level (12 percent of units) as other areas of Fairfax County, or that a larger density bonus should be provided to help offset the cost of provision. Some individual citizens have written to support the affordable housing requirements, but their support has been largely outnumbered by the sheer number of complaints from developers (Public Comments, 2009-2010). The Planning and

Zoning Committee is still considering how exactly to structure the affordable housing requirement, but it has already eliminated text from the third Comprehensive Plan draft that would have required a one-for-one replacement of existing market rate affordable units because it would have disadvantaged landowners who already supply affordable housing units and would have provided an incentive against redevelopment (Staff Report, 2010).

Finally, as currently drafted the Comprehensive Plan requires that all new developments meet LEED design standards. All developments are required to meet LEED stormwater guidelines. All residential developments are required to attain at least LEED Certified level,⁴ and all non-residential developments are required to attain at least LEED Silver level. In addition to these minimum requirements, any new development reaching Gold or Platinum level will be awarded a four percent or ten percent floor area bonus as an incentive (Fourth Draft, 2010). The LEED requirement itself has not been that controversial, with support from citizens, the Sierra Club, and acceptance from developers. However, many developers have suggested that the floor area bonuses should be larger to compensate for the high cost of achieving the upper certification levels (Public Comments, 2009-2010). The Planning and Zoning Committee seems unlikely to change these standards. However, it did already lower the requirement for residential developments from LEED Silver to LEED Certified between the third and fourth Comprehensive Plan drafts because the latest requirements for LEED Silver are significantly more difficult to attain in residential buildings than in commercial buildings, and many

⁴ There is a hierarchy of LEED standards, ranging from least to most demanding to attain: Certified, Silver, Gold, Platinum.

developers had complained about this discrepancy (Staff Report, 2010).

Density and Overall Development

While the preceding issues were all about what developers will be responsible for providing, there has also been extensive negotiation over both what constitutes appropriate zoning density within different areas of Tysons and what is an appropriate level of overall development for Tysons as a whole. These density questions lie at the heart of this vision, and density is what makes all the compromises possible. The vision is grounded in the theory of TOD, and thus the draft Comprehensive Plan separates Tysons Corner into eight districts: four higher-density TOD districts centered on the Metrorail stations and four lower-density non-TOD districts. In each of the TOD districts, there are three density tiers with progressively lower density as distance increases from a station. In each of the non-TOD districts, there is a single zoning density that is lower than the third tier of the TOD districts. In any of the districts, higher density development is possible if the density bonuses discussed above are earned. Also, total projected development is capped at 116 million square feet by 2050, a figure which was used for the transportation planning analyses (Fourth Draft, 2010).

Density issues have provoked a strong response from a broad array of stakeholders, and sometimes contradictory responses from different members of similar stakeholder groups. For example, many of the homeowners' associations from nearby subdivisions expressed skepticism about the ability of TOD to avoid increased traffic congestion and requested that density levels be kept to a minimum.

However, some individual residents of those subdivisions also wrote public comments strongly supporting the new vision and requesting that the Zoning and Planning Committee ensure density levels are high around the Metrorail stations. The Sierra Club also expressed a similar sentiment, arguing that it is very important for the Metrorail to succeed and therefore the Zoning and Planning Committee should not risk having too low a density in the TOD districts. Finally, many developers wrote letters and presented at hearings, making requests to increase both the proposed density for their own properties and the density allowances in TOD districts more generally (Public Comments, 2009-2010).

Density allowances have a direct impact on the level of profit that a developer can earn from their property. This is why they have been used as the central bargaining chip in the negotiation between use and exchange value interests in the process of shaping the new vision for Tysons. Because there has been such a wide range of responses on the density issue, the Planning and Zoning Committee is still considering an array of alternative density proposals. The outcome of this negotiation is yet to be determined, but developers have argued on many fronts that the density allowances provided to them in the current draft are insufficient to outweigh the high costs imposed by the myriad development standards and developer responsibilities included in the Comprehensive Plan. Getting this balance right is critical for the Planning and Zoning Committee because the entire vision depends on it. However, developers have every incentive to cry wolf now and push for higher density allowances, so it is unclear whether these warnings are valid or simply an attempt maximize their own profits.

Development Phasing Mechanisms

While the previous issues explored what development will look like and who will be responsible for the provision of what, a third area of dispute has been over how much control the Planning and Zoning Committee should have over the sequencing of development. In particular, three specific parts of the draft Comprehensive Plan's implementation strategy have been contentious. First, as currently written, the draft envisions public infrastructure funds coming from a wide range of sources (i.e. federal highway fundings, VA state funding, Fairfax County, etc.). However, one major source of funding considered in the current draft is a loosely defined "Community Development Authority" (CDA). The CDA could be at the district level or Tysons-wide, but either way it would be analogous to other development authorities (independent sources of funding for infrastructure and development projects), and it would be primarily funded through contributions from private developers. Second, the draft ties the maximum allowable development at any given time to the provision of specific infrastructural benchmarks (i.e. road improvements, progress implementing the grid of streets, a transit circulator within Tysons, open spaces, and public facilities) that would "trigger" further redevelopment. Finally, in order to ensure that redevelopment projects are capable of providing all the infrastructure necessary to develop the grid of streets and greenspace networks, the current draft requires any rezoning application to involve a minimum of 15 acres. (Fourth Draft, 2010).

Unsurprisingly, Tysons Corner developers responded quite negatively to this set of provisions. Many developers argued that by relying on CDAs to provide

infrastructure, Fairfax County was placing what should be a public burden onto the private market. Furthermore, in response to the phasing “triggers” many developers argued that they should not be punished should not be punished (by having development rights restricted) if the public sector fails to provide the necessary infrastructure. Finally, many developers loathe the 15 acre requirement because very few parcels total 15 or more acres, meaning that this requirement forces developers to coordinate redevelopment with adjacent landowners, rather than just redeveloping whenever it makes the most sense for them. Perhaps one of the strongest arguments has been that Fairfax County expects to collect nearly \$15 billion over the next 40 years in increased tax revenues, so they should be expected to invest much of that money to provide the needed infrastructure through the use of tax increment financing⁵ (Public Comments, 2009-2010).

Conversely, the Virginia Department of Transportation and many nearby residents argue very strongly for the need to maintain phasing triggers in order to ensure that the necessary pedestrian and traffic infrastructure and public facilities are at least funded before too much redevelopment is allowed to go forward. Otherwise, they argue, there is a real danger that development will race ahead with the expectation of infrastructure provision and then the existing infrastructure will be pushed over capacity long before the necessary infrastructure can be constructed. Furthermore, many nearby residents and homeowner’s associations argue that private developers should be forced to pay for much of the infrastructure costs because they stand to gain the most benefit from that infrastructure (Public

⁵ Tax increment financing is a means of funding development projects by taking out bonds up front and paying them off using future tax receipts.

Comments, 2009-2010). While nobody else (other than the developers) seemed to care about the 15 acre consolidation requirement, the Planning and Zoning Committee believes that it is absolutely necessary in order to ensure that developments have enough flexibility to provide for the grid of streets and open space network, and is unlikely to budge on either it or the phasing triggers (Staff Report, 2010).

Lessons for the Growth Machine and Political Economy of Place

So where does all of this leave Tysons Corner with respect to likely outcomes? It remains unclear, really, what exactly the final language will look like when the final draft of the new Comprehensive Plan is approved next month. Even if the language were certain, the exact outcome of development would not be known until 40 years from now. However, there are a number of lessons that can be learned from this examination of Tysons Corner's redevelopment process. First, the drafting of a Comprehensive Plan can serve as a natural space of engagement in which use and exchange value interests negotiate a vision for future development in that place. Furthermore, this case demonstrates the importance of acknowledging heterogeneity in use and exchange value interests. Logan and Molotch's original work on the growth machine thesis explicitly identified multiple competing place entrepreneurs that come together to form growth coalitions to compete for investment at a broader scale than they can on their own. This case highlights the existence of multiple different use value interest groups within that same space of engagement. Therefore, when major infrastructure projects or funds come from external sources,

it presents an opportunity for both use and exchange value interests to come out ahead, but their relative bargaining power in the process of apportioning those benefits will determine how they are ultimately distributed. Through this negotiation process, we gain a transparent view of the growth machine at work.

Moreover, “new” development visions are always structured by the place-history in which they are grounded, as well as their contemporary circumstances. For example, the vision of future development that has emerged in Tysons Corner is entirely dependent (indeed, sparked by) the arrival of the Dulles Metrorail, but it has also been influenced by contemporary examples from the Smart Growth and TOD movements. Furthermore, while Tysons Corner may appear at first glance to be heading down a radically different path than it arrived on, it is important to recognize that it is still a vision of growth. This insight is valuable for those who wish to promote an agenda of Smart Growth, New Urbanism, or Transit-Oriented Development. No matter how radically different a vision it is that one promotes, if it is fundamentally based on a notion of material growth, it is likely to be strongly influenced, if not implemented directly, by an existing growth machine. Even if the struggle surrounding the emergence of that vision breaks apart the dominant growth coalition, we could expect a new coalition to form around the promotion of this alternative form of growth. This is not necessarily cause for alarm, but it does suggest that in order to promote alternative visions of growth, one must become a knowledgeable agent, with a clear understanding of the inner workings of the development process and how best to manipulate them.

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