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A Green Makeover for Tysons Corner

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Tysons Corner exemplifies sprawl, but it could become a national model for smarter, greener development. With vision, thoughtful planning, superior design and careful steps to minimize adverse impacts on other communities, we could turn Tysons into one of the greenest communities in the country.

Tysons is one of the largest business districts in the United States, and it is the economic engine of Fairfax County. Yet it suffers from notorious traffic congestion, dangerous conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists, and vast swaths of parking lots that trap heat and produce polluted runoff. More than 120,000 people work in Tysons, but only 17,000 people live there, so most workers must drive in and out at the same time every day -- a sure-fire recipe for clogged roads and air pollution.

Tysons is a typical "edge city" that flourished in an era of cheap land and cheap energy, but it is also part of a larger problem: Sprawl and a lack of transportation choices are driving increases in the pollution that brings about climate change. Over the past two decades, Virginia's population increased 32 percent, but the amount of land developed increased much faster and vehicle miles traveled rose 94 percent. Increased driving has led to severe congestion, increased energy consumption and rising greenhouse gas emissions. Transportation is the fastest-rising source of carbon dioxide in Virginia, which produces more of it than many countries do. Fortunately, Tysons presents a grand opportunity to transform auto-dependent sprawl into a walkable, transit-oriented community that is more cohesive, vibrant and sustainable.

With the prospect of rail service in the Dulles corridor, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors created the Tysons Land Use Task Force to re-plan the area. After more than three years of work, the task force will soon complete its recommendations to the board, including:

- Creating a grid of streets, with sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks and other pedestrian amenities. A grid would disperse traffic and create safe conditions for people to walk and bike to work, shopping and recreation.
- Developing green buildings, which can reduce energy consumption and global warming emissions by 15 to 60 percent. If every new building in Tysons was certified as a LEED-Gold building, density in Tysons could double and emissions from buildings would still decrease.
- Planning for a dedicated right-of-way transit circulator, an essential component of a transportation network that would ensure that all parts of Tysons are accessible via transit and that would reduce automobile trips.
- Providing public parks throughout Tysons, which has no publicly accessible parks. A green network should link stream valleys, and Tysons should have a large central park.
- Requiring state-of-the-art techniques to manage polluted stormwater runoff from paved surfaces. About 70 percent of Tysons lacks stormwater management. In a generation, we could eliminate much of the impervious surface area and improve water quality in Scotts Run, Rocky Run and the Potomac River.

- Ensuring mixed-use and mixed-income development. Allowing people to live close to transit and jobs in Tysons -- and helping ensure that more people who work at Tysons can afford to live in or close to it -- is critical to reducing driving, energy consumption and global warming.
- Ensuring levels of density are high enough to create a vibrant, 24-hour community.

Everyone in Fairfax County would benefit from a more livable, walkable and environmentally sustainable Tysons Corner, with a wealth of parkland, transportation choices and buildings that would be a pleasure in which to live and work. Everyone in the country would benefit if the Fairfax board of supervisors has the political will to establish a national model to transform sprawl into sustainable communities. Never in the history of this country has such a dramatic transformation taken place. Nor has there ever been greater urgency.

-- **Trip Pollard**

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