Landmark/Van Dorn Area Plan
Learning from the Town Centers Tour

City of Alexandria Department of Planning and Zoning
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Landmark Mall

- 51.5 acres, approximately 1,000,000 sq ft retail space, FAR 0.45.
- Suburban model – everybody drives.
- Poor connections to adjacent uses.
- Single large structure – not adaptable to change incrementally.
- Lacks attractions other than retail uses.

Landmark Mall, Duke Street frontage
Landmark Mall

- Increasingly obsolete in a market with a number of newer centers.
- Assessed value and revenue falling.
- Underutilized prime site with excellent access to I-395 and the Capital Beltway.
Fairfax Corner

- 25 acres, 200,000 sq ft retail, 129,000 sq ft office, 488 apartments, FAR.
- “Main Street” concept with rear and street parking.
- Mixed retail, office, residential use, but no neighborhood retail to make the mix effective in reducing trips.
- Suburban model, view from the arterial street is of a parking lot.

- Relatively low intensity, much surface parking.
- Long-term plan is for more parking structures and additional uses, intensity to 1.0 FAR.
Fairfax Corner

Lessons learned

• Possible **transitional strategy** for low-density retail centers.

• **Not likely to have sufficient development intensity** to justify mixed-use redevelopment in Landmark/Van Dorn.

• **Lifestyle centers can succeed** near regional centers and neighborhood centers.

Wide, tree-lined sidewalks create “Main Street” character
Reston Town Center

- 84 acres, 220,000 sq ft retail, 1.1 million sq ft office, 518-room hotel, 500+ residential units, more to come.
- Pedestrian-scaled blocks.
- No conventional retail anchors.
- Above-grade parking structures surround the core.
- Variety of open spaces.
- Mix of heights with attention to skyline appearance.
- Suburban setting – almost everybody drives.
Reston Town Center

- Details:
  - Street Hierarchy – A: Main street, B: secondary streets, C: service streets.
  - All interior streets have narrow urban cross-section: one lane each way plus curb parking.
  - Main street – sidewalks about 25 feet wide on either side.
  - Attention to retail facades and retail continuity.
Reston Town Center

- A variety of open spaces:
  - Landscaped, hardscaped.
  - Oriented to different groups and activities.
  - Streets, passages, plazas, parks.
  - No connected open space network apparent.
  - Regional corridor potential at periphery.
Reston Town Center

Lessons Learned

• Attention to architectural detail pays off.
• Attractive, fun public spaces, for a variety of age groups and activities gives variety to experience.
• Seeks to support multiple uses and create a lively atmosphere.
• Provides an enhanced sense of place for suburban Reston.
• Suburban setting means little attention paid to local access, pedestrian access or appearance at periphery.
• Parking structures not well integrated.
Downtown Silver Spring

- Greater downtown has three separate nodes:
  - Office at Metro
  - Residential to north
  - Retail to east
- Retail district has recently been substantially redeveloped:
  - Public parking structures
  - Walking street can be closed
  - Restaurant and entertainment cluster very active on weekend and evenings.
Downtown Silver Spring

Lessons Learned:

- Needs more residential in the mix – some is coming.
- Developed by a single entity – architecture too similar.
- Includes preservation at Georgia and Coleville Roads.
- Open space quality good.
- Two open spaces connected by pedestrian street, works well.
Downtown Silver Spring

Lessons Learned

- **Difficult sense of place.**
- Major arterials make pedestrian access difficult.
- Auto- and bus-dominated metro area makes metro less of an asset than it could be.
- **Variety of owners** makes achieving an overall design more difficult.
Bethesda Row

- One-block area with opposite faces.
- Bookstore + small retail, grocery, restaurants.
- Parking concealed within block.
- Mixed retail, office and residential uses.
- Exciting live-work-play environment created in a small area.
Bethesda Row

Lessons Learned:

• **Sidewalks** can feel like great public spaces.

• **Small open spaces** can be important.

• **Parking convenient but not obtrusive**

• **New development/design has enhanced value of adjacent neighborhoods.**
Connecticut Avenue

- Neighborhood retail clusters along arterial street with traffic volumes similar to those on Van Dorn Street.
- 1920s zoning resulted in retail nodes rather than continuous strips.
- Cleveland Park: 175,000 sq ft retail, Woodley Park: 90,000 sq ft retail.
Connecticut Avenue

Lessons Learned:

• High traffic volume streets can also be neighborhood centers.

• Density and transit focus helps support retail.

• Architectural quality varied yet high quality
Rosslyn

- 8 million sq ft office, 6,000 dwelling units, most in separate areas.
- Developed prior to Metro.
- Skywalk system for pedestrians.
- Office area doesn’t provide evening business needed for successful retail.
- Steetscape being retrofitted to make it more pedestrian-friendly.
Rosslyn

Lessons learned

- Office-only areas are dead except during office hours, and therefore do not support significant retail use.

- Dual-level circulation with pedestrians above street level is difficult to implement successfully.
Clarendon Market Common

- 12 acres, 220,000 sq ft retail, 387 residential units, 1650 parking spaces.
- Large block, but broken by pedestrian passages.
- Mix of building heights.
- Residential over retail.
- Arranged as a node off adjacent arterial with central loop road and open space.
Clarendon Market Common

Lessons Learned:

- Modest scale and **tight arrangement** works well.
- **Variety of heights**, step-backs for taller buildings are effective in reducing sensation of height and bulk.
- **Loop system** seems to work well at least at this short length (about 250 feet).
- Integration of parking – **don’t notice the parking**.
Clarendon Market Common

Lessons Learned:

• **Lifestyle mix works** well
  – destination retail plus restaurants.

• Streetscape feels **good for pedestrian** circulation.

• Lively **public spaces** add interest.

• Distance across too long for a longer center – tend to walk around.
Ballston

- Office, hotel and residential at Metro, shopping center and ice center two blocks away.
- Taller buildings, to 20+ stories, high FAR.
- Ground-floor retail in some areas.
- Interior skywalk from Metro to mall.
Ballston

Lessons Learned:

• 20-story buildings lining both sides of an entire urban block feel oppressive without stepbacks, breaks or façade articulation.

• Even small open spaces can add a lot to character.

• 2nd-level circulation mall to metro contributes to a retail vacuum at street level.

• Series of service entrances make uninviting pedestrian streets.

• Implementation takes time.
Ballston
Summary (DRAFT)

- Establish and maintain principles of **character and quality** at the beginning.
- Seek a **mix of uses** through all development cycles.
- Provide a high quality **street grid and streetscape** to achieve a mixed-use **pedestrian environment**.
- Develop regulatory choices (codes and guidelines) that provide a **framework for growth** that can respond to diverse markets.
Summary (DRAFT)

- Conceptualize tall buildings on narrow streets with relief via stepbacks, significant massing and façade articulation, and/or building breaks, to be comfortable for pedestrians and to admit sunlight.

- Plan for a range of diverse spaces in size and use.

- Strategize for a 25-year time horizon from plan to substantial success, yet seek to have phase one of the vision complete in five years.