

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.



Landmark Mall interior

## 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.



Parking structures at periphery

# 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.



Market Street: storefronts on Reston Town Center's Main Street

# 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.



Town Center Park

# 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.



AFI Silver Theater

# 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.



Silver Spring Metro Station

## 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

Parking structure wrapped with active uses

## 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.



Open space at Barnes & Noble

# 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.
- Streetscape 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:

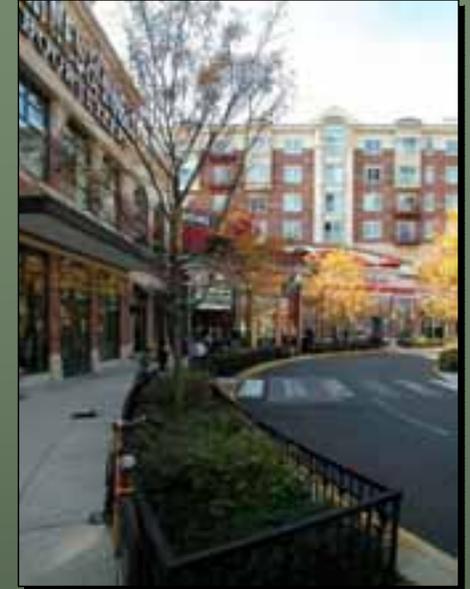
- Modest scale and **tight arrangement** works well.
- **Variety of heights**, step-backs for taller buildings are effective in reducing sensation of height and bulk.
- **Loop system** seems to work well at least at this short length (about 250 feet).
- Integration of parking – **don't notice the parking.**



# 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.
- 2<sup>nd</sup>-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.