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VISION AND URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

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2A

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN VISION FOR THE RICHMOND HIGHWAY AREA

In March 2018, Fairfax County adopted a new Comprehensive Plan for the Richmond Highway area (Plan). This chapter describes the vision and urban design themes of the Plan and how these have informed the *District Guidelines*.

The Comprehensive Plan envisions the transformation of the Richmond Highway area into a series of distinctive and vibrant activity Centers supported by a variety of multimodal transportation options. These include an interconnected street network, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and a high-quality bus rapid transit (BRT) system between the Huntington Metrorail Station and Fort Belvoir, with a future connection to Prince William County. The Plan also envisions a future extension of the Yellow line Metrorail to Hybla Valley.

The Comprehensive Plan designates six CBCs to serve as priority redevelopment areas and focal points along the Richmond Highway Transit Boulevard. From north to south, these are North Gateway, Penn Daw, Beacon/Groveton, Hybla Valley-Gum Springs, South County, and Woodlawn.

Each CBC is envisioned as a distinct, compact, pedestrian-friendly, and transit-oriented place offering a mix of residential and non-residential uses. Through redevelopment, each CBC is planned to achieve a transit-supportive mix of uses within a one-quarter- to one-half-mile radii of the BRT stations.

Other key elements of the Comprehensive Plan's vision for these CBCs include:

- An active mix of uses
- A hierarchy of street and streetscape types
- An interconnected system of open spaces; and,
- Building design that fosters active street frontages, distinctive architecture, and compatibility with adjacent neighborhoods.

Interspersed with the CBCs along the Richmond Highway Transit Boulevard, are six SNAs. The SNAs are envisioned as primarily lower-density residential areas with neighborhood-serving retail.

Derived from the Plan's vision, four major urban design themes for the Richmond Highway area - **Legacy, Ecology, Connectivity,** and **Placemaking** - that provide an overarching framework for these *District Guidelines*.

1. LEGACY

The urban environment should be designed to preserve heritage resources and viewsheds that distinguish the Richmond Highway area. The Richmond Highway area's rich history should be expressed through its design in a way that reveals and accentuates "legacy features," including infrastructure, old road and trail alignments, Richmond Highway's role as a 20th century transportation network, pre-World War II settlement patterns, cultural assets, earlier inhabitants and businesses, and the area's aviation history. Creative urban design should interpret and commemorate these heritage features, embedding them in the design of public spaces and streetscapes and integrating them as distinguished elements of the CBCs.

2. ECOLOGY

Urban design should strengthen the relationship between people and nature throughout the Richmond Highway area by protecting, restoring, and celebrating the area's rich ecological resources. Streets, public spaces, and private developments should embrace, preserve, and rehabilitate natural systems within and adjacent to the area, while also emphasizing the value of connected ecological assets and stormwater management facilities as urban design features. Urban design should employ tools and methods such as innovative green stormwater infrastructure techniques, environmentally-friendly building design, and a network of linear parks called "Ecological Spines" which "daylight" or restore local stream corridors. All of these approaches will establish a network of "green corridors" throughout the Richmond Highway area that provide vital open space linkages, habitat areas and ecological services.

3. CONNECTIVITY

The new grid of streets and their blocks should enable and encourage walking, bicycling, and transit use for daily transportation and recreation needs. Redevelopment should result in an interconnected network of existing and new streets while supporting Richmond Highway's function as a Transit

Boulevard. The BRT system should be served by a series of accessible, pedestrian-friendly BRT stations and transit plazas. Moreover, a network of high-quality streetscapes and public spaces along the Richmond Highway Transit Boulevard and within the CBCs should prioritize the pedestrian experience while orienting users to the area's overall identity and sense of place.

4. PLACEMAKING

Richmond Highway's sense of place is shaped by both its architecture and its public spaces.

i. Distinctive, Cohesive and Compatible Architecture

Building design should be guided by a form-based approach that encourages distinctive architecture while establishing a strong, unified identity for the area. Architectural variety and interest should be created through techniques such as step-backs and step downs, façade modulation, and varied building heights. Building design should also be used to foster appropriate transitions between higher-intensity development near BRT stations and the surrounding neighborhoods, all while creating usable outdoor amenities and maximizing sunlight.

ii. Diverse and Active Public Spaces

The Richmond Highway area should be distinguished by a variety of public spaces that serve the needs of residents and visitors. Unique public spaces - including two types of linear parks ("Ecological Spines" and "Livability Spines"), transit plazas at BRT stations, and neighborhood parks in CBCs - should function as primary organizing elements within CBCs and along Richmond Highway. The design of public spaces should consider the needs of the anticipated users to ensure that they are welcoming to a diverse population. These spaces should be designed to accommodate a range of active and passive recreational opportunities. To generate activity and foster social interaction, public spaces should be framed by, and integrated into, surrounding development. The spaces outside buildings should be activated by the buildings' ground floor design and by programmed activities, which may also serve as venues for planned events.

2B URBAN DESIGN THEMES

2C URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Urban design can influence both the form and character of the Richmond Highway area, as well as how people navigate through and experience it. The Richmond Highway area is envisioned to have both cohesive and distinctive elements. Some uniformity of elements should be carried throughout the area, while allowing each CBC to have its own unique identity.

Achieving a balance between a cohesive Richmond Highway area and the distinct identities of its CBCs requires a multi-layered urban design approach. These “layers” are described in greater detail below.

AREA-WIDE GUIDANCE

The design of the Richmond Highway area plays a central role in balancing the cohesion and differentiation of its CBCs and provides the “connective ribbon” that ties the distinct area together. Key cohesive elements along the Richmond Highway Transit Boulevard include consistent paving materials and patterns; shade trees along its entire length; a continuous, planted median accommodating the BRT; similarly designed station areas; and, distinctive buildings fronting the Richmond Highway Transit Boulevard. The trees in the median and along the streetscapes on both sides of Richmond Highway establish its defining characteristic and its memorable image.

SUB-AREA GUIDANCE: NORTH AREA AND SOUTH AREA

Specific urban design features (e.g., furnishings, signage and wayfinding, and building design) are used to reinforce the differences in context and character between the northern segment of the Richmond Highway area (North Area) and the southern segment (South Area) (see *Graphic 10*). A more contemporary aesthetic is suggested for the character and built form of the North Area CBCs (North Gateway, Penn Daw, and Beacon/Groveton), while the southern portion (Hybla Valley–Gum Springs, South County, and Woodlawn CBCs) should have a more traditional aesthetic. Chapters 3 and 4 describe how contemporary and traditional design aesthetics can be applied to elements such as furnishings and building design.

PLACE-SPECIFIC GUIDANCE

i. Richmond Highway Transit Boulevard

The design of the Richmond Highway Transit Boulevard is generally consistent within the public right-of-way. It includes uniform treatments for paving, landscaping, and lighting. However, there is an ebb and flow of building frontages as these alternate between the more urban frontage of the CBCs and the wider, greener setbacks of the SNAs.

ii. Distinguishing Elements of Community Business Centers

There are specific urban design elements that distinguish each CBC. These distinguishing elements are identified in Chapter 6 and add another layer of place-specific design guidance to the area-wide and North/South approaches.

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