

Council Votes to Increase Incentives to Build Near Public Transit

posted 5:58 pm Wed November 11, 2009 - MONTGOMERY COUNTY, Md.

from NewsChannel 8 - <http://www.news8.net/news/stories/1109/677202.html>

Montgomery County is continuing its effort for smart growth in an effort to cut back on traffic congestion.

The council's vote Tuesday makes Metro stations more attractive to developers by offering them a way to save money. Currently every new development comes with an extra fee to compensate for traffic impact. But if companies build high-density projects by Metro stops, that traffic impact fee will be dropped by 25 percent.

Council President Phil Andrews called the change minor but the idea of increasing urban density surrounding Metro stops could mean major changes for White Flint.

Empty sidewalks, barren stairs but busy streets is the typical transportation pattern in White Flint. "I don't need any more traffic," said resident Marlene Harte.

Right now, the Montgomery County Council's planning committee is considering a White Flint sector plan to increase urban density and hopefully decrease car dependency.

An Italian native says that's a good idea. "In Europe we use public transportation all the time and here it's like people want to be comfortable," said resident Margherita Bebi.

Others aren't as open minded. "It's over-developed if you ask me," said resident Byron Tyler.

With land locked in a string of strip malls, there are questions about where the proposed high rises would be built. "The strip malls and surface parking areas would be redeveloped," said Andrews.

Andrews says that working out the details will take some time. "I think there's agreement that White Flint and the area around it could be redeveloped in a very attractive way that would include a substantial increase in density and that could be justified because it's close to a Metro," he said.

For the next several months, the planning committee will work on infrastructure analysis and cost projections -- which Andrews estimates will be in the billions.

"How are we going to ensure that that infrastructure that is necessary to support the additional development, how will that be paid for and when will it be done? It needs to be done in concert with the development -- not years after," he said.

"I wouldn't be for it, but I'm not against it because I think it's a wave of the future," noted Harte.

Andrews wants to clarify that the growth plan the council approved Tuesday is about whether the current infrastructure is sufficient to support new development. A *Washington Post* article said the council endorsed a car-free blueprint for growth but Andrews says that's not the reality and residents will continue driving for years to come.

© 2009 NewsChannel 8, a division of Allbritton Communications Company
All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.



Remember how your legs used to look?