

PRESS RELEASE

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Rose Hill Coalition

Alexandria, VA (Fairfax County)

Coalition Opposes Rezoning Rose Hill Plaza to Mixed Use

The Rose Hill Coalition (<https://rosehillcoalition.org>) is in the urgent process of stopping the rezoning of the Rose Hill Shopping Center in Alexandria, VA, from commercial to retail/residential mixed-use. The Coalition was formed in response to plans that were presented earlier this year by Combined Properties, Inc. (CP) to two local civic associations, that proposed to demolish the center, reduce retail at the center by more than 70%, and add 400+ rental four- and six-story residential units.

On October 25, CP formally submitted an application for rezoning to the Fairfax Board of Supervisors. This is the required first step to change zoning restrictions outlined in the Comprehensive Plan (referred to as a Site Specific Plan Amendment or SSPA). At its December 6, 2022, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors voted in favor of allowing the application to go forward for consideration by the County and the public under the SSPA review process. This multi-step process will allow for public comment at several stages.

However, due to recent changes in the SSPA process which accelerates the timeline, the Coalition urged residents to contact Lee District Supervisor Rodney Lust and the Board of Supervisors to voice their opposition "out of the gate" prior to their meeting on December 6.

Within a 12-day span prior to the Dec 6 meeting, more than 67 residents sent emails to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors opposing the nomination submitted by Combined Properties. These were emails on which the Coalition was copied.

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Letter were also sent to the BOS opposing the nomination by the Rose Hill Civic Association and the Gunnell Estates HOA.

The Rose Hill Coalition presents that the shopping center is an integral part of the community and that the center is a commercial success. "We hope that Combined Properties sees this an opportunity to improve the shopping center," said Sharada Gilkey, founder of the Coalition. "We would like to work with CP to support and improve the center to ensure the future success of its local businesses, small and large, and to better serve the local community."

Until then, the Coalition will promote the interests of residents to oppose the rezoning. Following the December 6, BOS approval to allow Combined Properties' SSPA application to move forward, the next steps will include community meetings organized by the County in January and February 2023.

The Coalition contends that CP did not take into consideration the objections voiced by many residents during CP's first plan presentations. Furthermore, CP presented a second "revised" design that added new elements which contradicted and ignored residents' objections. These additional elements include further reduced retail, increased height of the residential structures, and an intersection that conflicts with the current roads and respective safety of students and pedestrians.

Objections to rezoning the shopping center include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Increased traffic from additional 400+ residents in an already stressed transportation corridor on Rose Hill Drive, Franconia Road, and Van Dorn (north and south).
- Reduction in walk-able retail and office from 154,000 square feet to less than 75,000 square feet.
- Imposition of high-intensity development in an established low-density-zoned residential district.
- The proposed four- and six-level apartment complex will be visually inconsistent with the surrounding one- and two-level single family homes.
- The local infrastructure is not designed to support increased energy and water use and there are no future County plans or funding are in place to improve them.

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- School traffic to and from Bush Hill Elementary and Rose Hill Elementary Schools already significantly impede traffic on Rose Hill Dr, Westchester St, and Franconia Rd.
- The design creates a dangerous four-way intersection at Westchester St and Franconia Rd just several hundred feet from Rose Hill Dr and Franconia Rd.
- The proposal significantly diminishes retail, thus negating future walkability if there is little to "walk to".
- Additional emissions due to increased traffic from 400+ more vehicles from renters (plus visitors).
- Demolition and construction will last two years during which there will be no shopping center, except for McDonalds which is independently owned.
- Majority of the 25+ businesses currently serving the community at the shopping center will disappear.

The Coalition contends that CP has no incentive to alter their plan as presented. Combined Properties Inc (<https://www.combined.biz/>) is a billion dollar real estate investment company and has multiple residential, retail, and mixed-use developments in Fairfax County. The cost to demolish and reconstruct a mixed use (primarily residential) center and guarantee long-term profit to investors requires the proposed ~400 residential rental units be central to the design.

More than 25 businesses currently occupy the center and are considered an integral part of the community. Contrary to CP's application, the Coalition argues that the property does in fact utilize and provide proximity to business centers, public transportation, and experiential retail/amenities.

Although the County is aggressively seeking options to increase the amount of housing, the Coalition argues that CP's proposal and change in zoning application contradicts the Comprehensive Plan for the Rose Hill Planning Area. Allowing an exception to the zoning in this case would irreparably alter the character, safety, and quality of life in this highly diverse established community.

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