

Rose Hill Coalition

Rose Paper: CP's Proposal

Opposition to Nomination CPN22-LE-001

**“Absent an outcome in the SSPA process,
the future of the Rose Hill Center is uncertain at best.”
– Combined Properties**

Fairfax County should not be ignoring the policies of the Comprehensive Plan and regularly ruling “by exception”. To do so undermines state law and the rights of its citizens, because the Plan is no longer being consistently used as a guide. Combined Properties (CP) buys into this pattern of exception when it boldly declares that the Comprehensive Plan is not consistent with the County’s goals.

CP: The Property’s Comprehensive Plan site recommendations are out of step with the County’s envisioned goals for redevelopment.

Source: Combined Properties Inc application to Fairfax County,
<https://ffxocr.virginiainteractive.org/sites/default/files/Assets/documents/PDFs/LE-001-web.pdf>

The Comprehensive Plan is referenced by staff and the public to use in the planning process. However, it appears even the County no longer abides by the Plan as it is no longer being used and has not been updated with input from the community since 2017. Current policy practiced according to the SSPA is "spot planning" which contradicts the Plan and leaves limited room for public comment.

The Comprehensive Plan (the Plan) is required by state law to be used as a guide to decision-making about the natural and built environment by the county’s Board of Supervisors, and others such as the Planning Commission and the Board of Zoning Appeals. It is also a guide for county staff and the public to use in the planning process.

The Comprehensive Plan consists of the Policy Plan, four Area Plan volumes, and a Plan Map. The Policy Plan volume includes general countywide policy on land use, transportation, housing, the environment, heritage resources, economic development, and public facilities, including public parks, recreation and trails.

Source: Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/planning-development/fairfax-county-comprehensive-plan>

The Plan specifically limits development of Rose Hill Plaza to commercial (office and retail) use. The Plan also states, “Revitalization efforts should work in concert with other community programs and infrastructure improvements and strive to foster a sense of place unique to each area, thereby contributing to the social and economic well-being of the community and the county.” CP objects to the Comprehensive Plan now because specifically limits what they want to build today. CP has no concern for the social and economic well-being of the community as they specifically state that they have already envisioned the demise of the shopping center to the detriment of the neighborhood.

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...the limited FAR prescribed in the Comprehensive Plan prevents the Applicant from developing the site into an attractive mix of residential and commercial uses, as desired by the County.... If the Property is not accepted into this cycle's SSPA process, the Property risks long-term vacancies until 2035 which is detrimental to the health of the Property and the neighborhood.

Source: Combined Properties Inc application to Fairfax County,
<https://ffxocr.virginiainteractive.org/sites/default/files/Assets/documents/PDFs/LE-001-web.pdf>

The current shopping center has community-oriented retail that is well supported by thousands in the surrounding communities. (see [Public Testimony](#))

As for the housing shortage, the shortage is for *single-family homes*. The shortage is for *affordable housing*. This proposal resolves neither of these shortages. As for revitalizing the local economy, there is no evidence that the local economy of this neighborhood needs revitalization. However, CP continues to argue to the contrary.

CP: The existing single-story retail structure presents as an outdated, auto-oriented concept that contradicts Fairfax County's goals and objectives that favor community based, mixed-use development as a means to combat the County's housing shortage and revitalize the local economy.

Source: Combined Properties Inc application to Fairfax County,
<https://ffxocr.virginiainteractive.org/sites/default/files/Assets/documents/PDFs/LE-001-web.pdf>

The community supports reducing impervious surface, providing new open space areas and amenities, and creating a more engaged streetscape that will ultimately reposition the shopping center as a modern anchor for the neighborhood. All of these do not require rezoning for mixed use. To the contrary, a mixed-use four- and six-story apartment buildings with 400+ units and minimal retail will no longer serve as an "anchor" for the community. CP admits that it has neglected the property and now, only in their application, calls for it to meet the County's goals for more green space.

CP: This nomination request provides the opportunity to advance a number of well-settled planning objectives that include the provision of housing, reducing impervious surface, providing new open space areas and amenities, and creating a more engaged streetscape that will ultimately reposition the shopping center as a modern mixed-use anchor for the neighborhood."

Source: Combined Properties Inc application to Fairfax County,
<https://ffxocr.virginiainteractive.org/sites/default/files/Assets/documents/PDFs/LE-001-web.pdf>

The Comprehensive Plan *purposefully* limits development of Rose Hill Plaza to commercial (office and retail) use. However, contrary to CP's application, the Comprehensive Plan is not inflexible. It allows amendments and a process for review that includes the public that will be directly affected by any changes.

CP: The plan as written is inflexible and significantly limits the Applicant's ability to provide more valuable resources to the community. ...the limited FAR prescribed in the Comprehensive Plan prevents the Applicant from developing the site into an attractive mix of residential and commercial uses, as desired by the County.

Source: Combined Properties Inc application to Fairfax County,
<https://ffxocr.virginiainteractive.org/sites/default/files/Assets/documents/PDFs/LE-001-web.pdf>

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County policies should promote a balanced and harmonious community where a high quality of life can be maintained. This does not exclude any demographic. See [Demographics](#).

...the [Comprehensive] Plan recognizes the changes that have taken place in the county and the challenges that lie ahead. The objectives and policies presented...provide guidance for an appropriate pattern and pace of development and they indicate how this development should relate to the existing and future community.

They also provide a logical framework for land-use decision-making at a conceptual level as well as on an area-wide and site-specific basis. Uniform application of these objectives and policies should result in a balanced and harmonious community where a high quality of life can be maintained.

Since all policy areas, whether housing, employment or the environment achieve physical realization through the land use plan, the development and implementation of sound and consistent land use principles is critical to the realization of county goals.

Source: Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/planning-development/fairfax-county-comprehensive-plan>

The redevelopment plan proposed by Combined Properties is neither attractive nor does it contribute to the social and economic well-being of neighboring residents. Resident's comments during two separate presentations of the CP redesign were summarily negative, especially concerning the high number of residential rental units proposed.

CP's second or "revised" design completely ignored the initial concerns of residents and even added additional elements contrary to the concerns, including:

- Further reducing the amount of retail/office space
- Increasing the height of one of the residential units from four stories to six stories immediately adjacent to Franconia Road
- Adding an entrance on Franconia Road immediately across Westchester Street, which serves as a main entrance to the community and is already difficult to maneuver at the best of times.

Yet, CP inaccurately claims they listened and responded to the community's concerns.

CP: The Applicant has thoughtfully scaled back initial designs of the proposed development in response to community engagement that took place in the Spring of 2022 and consolidated the previously contemplated multi-building development into a single mixed use residential building with approximately 56,000 square feet of retail and green space.

The development will achieve a height of approximately four stories to the south, in response to the existing three-story Rose Hill Apartments (which includes approximately 13 buildings and 445 units) and scale up to six stories as the residential building reaches Franconia Road to the north.

The Applicant will also locate a parking garage structure at the center of the Property, the majority of which will be concealed by the residential structure. Additionally, a freestanding jewel box retail building will be positioned on the Property's frontage, bordering the proposed green space along Rose Hill Drive.

Source: Combined Properties Inc application to Fairfax County, <https://ffxocr.virginiainteractive.org/sites/default/files/Assets/documents/PDFs/LE-001-web.pdf>

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We propose that much of the current property can be easily modified to significantly reduce asphalt and add green space. This would be at considerably less cost and be welcomed by the community. CP's proposal provides minimal publicly accessible green space. In fact the revised plan call for 56,000 sq ft of retail and greenspace. No further breakdown has been provided.

CP: ...the proposed redevelopment will provide green space along the Property's frontage, and Courtyards throughout the residential development, to provide opportunities for passive recreation. For comparison, the existing Property is comprised almost entirely of impervious surface and fails to provide green space and other environmentally friendly amenities.

Source: Combined Properties Inc application to Fairfax County,
<https://ffxocr.virginiainteractive.org/sites/default/files/Assets/documents/PDFs/LE-001-web.pdf>

Combined Properties has padded their proposal with elements that can be easily and more cost-effectively achieved within the current designation as a commercial property (but historically has chosen not to). With the present shopping center, CP can reduce impervious surfaces, provide new open space, and create a more engaging streetscape. The center is already an anchor for the community. Yet CP implies that none of this can be achieved unless the property is converted to mixed-use.

CP: This nomination request provides the opportunity to advance a number of well-settled planning objectives that include the provision of housing, reducing impervious surface, providing new open space areas and amenities, and creating a more engaged streetscape that will ultimately reposition the shopping center as a modern mixed-use anchor for the neighborhood.

Source: Combined Properties Inc application to Fairfax County,
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CP has previously ensured with other properties, and clearly states in this application, that the current property will deteriorate to the point that the current businesses in the center can no longer be sustained. The community then is put in a position that the property no longer meets its needs and that the property becomes a detriment to the safety, security, and high quality of life of residents in the Rose Hill Planning District. Ultimately, they threaten to turn the shopping center into a blight.

CP: More importantly, the Property's existing commercial leases are scheduled to lapse in 2027, which has been strategically timed with the desired start date for construction of the proposed development for the Summer of 2027. The Applicant is cognizant that the Property will be unlikely to attract retail tenants in the interim due to the likelihood of near-term redevelopment. If the Property is not accepted into this cycle's SSPA process, the Property risks long-term vacancies until 2035 which is detrimental to the health of the Property and the neighborhood.

Source: Combined Properties Inc application to Fairfax County,
<https://ffxocr.virginiainteractive.org/sites/default/files/Assets/documents/PDFs/LE-001-web.pdf>

The center opened in the 1961 and followed the then popular design of neighborhood shopping centers. Combined Properties has purchased the property in 1985 (for about \$8 million and County assessment records currently value it at \$28.5 million) and is thus responsible for its current state. It has invested as little as possible into the center or the needs of its tenants and local residents. As noted by the adjacent community of Rose Hill,

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Contrary to their statement, the property does in fact utilize and provide proximity to experiential retail/amenities (restaurants, etc.). According to the shopping center's website (managed by Combined Properties), "Rose Hill Plaza features...a strong merchandise mix of casual eateries and retailers."

More than 22 retailers and businesses currently occupy the center. Many of these would go out of business and lose hundreds of thousands of dollars in investments.

CP: The Property lacks green space, street trees, or any other facilities that encourage and accommodate multi-modal and pedestrian-oriented circulation. As it is currently improved, the Property fails to utilize its proximity to business centers and public transportation to provide necessary housing for the community and desired experiential retail and amenities.

Source: Combined Properties Inc application to Fairfax County,
<https://ffxocr.virginiainteractive.org/sites/default/files/Assets/documents/PDFs/LE-001-web.pdf>

The redevelopment of the shopping center will no longer fundamentally serve the neighborhood and adjacent communities. See [Community Response](#) tab.

CP: The proposed redevelopment will remain fundamentally neighborhood serving. To that end, the proposed redevelopment will complement the stable existing uses and enhance the surrounding environment.

Source: Combined Properties Inc application to Fairfax County,
<https://ffxocr.virginiainteractive.org/sites/default/files/Assets/documents/PDFs/LE-001-web.pdf>

The original CP proposed plan design was presented at the March and May 2022 meetings for residents' feedback. The responses to the original plan were overwhelmingly negative. Residents were opposed to the number of residential units (400+), the reduction in retail/office space (from 154,000 sq ft to 75,000 sq ft), the heights of the buildings (3 and 4 story), the parking garage (4-level), lack of convenient street-level parking, and the general appearance.

March 2022: Presentation to Rose Hill Civic Assn

May 2022: Presentation to Brookland-Bush Hill Civic Assn (*see Draft Meeting Minutes*)

Sources:

Rose Hill Coalition, https://rosehillcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/CP-Concept-Plan-1_May-2022-1.pdf

Draft Minutes: BBHCA Meeting May 10, 2022, *BBHCA News*, Sept 2022, p 1, https://bbhca.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/BBHCA-News_Sept-2022.pdf

In early October 2022, CP submitted a revised plan design to the local civic association leadership. CP further reduced the retail/office space (from 75,000 sq ft to less than 56,000 sq ft), increased the height of the buildings (4- and 6-story), and placed residential units over the retail space to create a 6-story building on Franconia Road. *The only changes that took into account the concerns of residents were a smaller parking garage (3-story) and a small increase in street-level parking.*

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Unless it gets its way, Combined Properties assures everyone that the Plaza will become a blight in the community. This is reckless, dangerous, and most likely illegal.

Combined Properties has clearly threatened to bring down the Rose Hill Plaza down. Already it has increased rents, limited leases, and not extended leases. It promises to allow full degradation of the site: “Absent an outcome in the SSPA process, the future of the Rose Hill Center is uncertain at best.”

The proposal completely disregards the needs of the local residents and their desire to make Rose Hill Plaza as a valuable resource long into the future.

Prior to submitting the SSPA we engaged several community associations and ad hoc groups of owners. We presented conceptual plans that were intended to show the potential for a mixed use option that would retain meaningful retail, add open spaces and include complimentary residential uses. More importantly, we tried to objectively frame both the challenges and opportunities that needed to be addressed to ensure the continued viability and success of the center in a retail environment that has undergone many structural shifts.

Absent an outcome in the SSPA process, the future of the Rose Hill Center is uncertain at best. As we have explained, we are at the point in the leasing life cycle whereby we can make the necessary transition out of existing leases to facilitate near term redevelopment. If it becomes clear that an outcome in this process is not achievable, the retail center would continue to operate in its current state, and the opportunity to move Rose Hill Center forward would be lost for the foreseeable future, making it very difficult to justify meaningful reinvestment in the center. By comparison, a retail oriented mixed use program provides alternative and enhanced revenue streams that can transform Rose Hill and ensure it remains a community serving asset.

Source: Combined Properties Letter to Stakeholders, 1/10/23, <https://rosehillcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/CP-Letter-to-Stakeholders-Rose-Hill-Shopping-Center169329290.1.pdf>