Comments to Council at Public Discussion, 09/17/11
Advocating for Better, Community-based Planning

1. Owen Curtis, 5465 Fillmore, transportation consultant in No VA for nearly 40 years, conducted multi-modal planning from ME to CA, past President of the VA Section of the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), and co-chair of the ITE Committee which just published a *Recommended Practice for Planning Urban Roadway Systems.* This is the first stop on my "book tour."

2. Purpose: advocate for better community-based planning
   a. Planning which reflects the values of the citizens, voters, and business interests of the impacted neighborhoods

3. BRAC Advisory Group, Beauregard Corridor Study, and the High Capacity Corridor Working Group: 3 interrelated efforts have taken up far too many hours of citizen time, too many of our precious tax dollars, and generated significant concern about the impacts we are beginning to feel in the West End. None of these would be characterized as good community-based planning:
   a. BRAC fails because it was "planning after the fact."
   b. Beauregard Corridor fails because it is in response to developers, developer-based, and developer-driven. The other night, when a citizen had the nerve to suggest that the community might want to have the Small Area Plan reflect no increase in density for the developers' properties, the developer's rep stated that "without the increases we want, there is no Small Area Plan." That pretty much says it all: :"if we can't have it our way, we'll

take our ball and go home." The Beauregard Corridor is NOT an historic planning area for our city – we have small area plans with which we are generally comfortable. City staff, over citizen objections, Gerry-mandered the area to cut out all of the single family homes around the Mark Center developer properties with the exception of the West Ridge townhouses and the Foster/Fairbanks single-family detached homes, where the residents are tired of the surrounding developer pressures and are looking to sell out for what they hope is a decent price. That is NOT community-based planning. That is planning for a specific set of commercial properties owned by organizations who are NOT part of the Alexandria community of the West End. If the City is to achieve a plan, I strongly urge staff and leadership to revisit what area needs to be planned, stop the charade of doing the developers' bidding, and truly create a community-based planning effort. I think you will find that very easy, as the community's desires are simple:

  i. Preserve the many assets we have.
  ii. Fix the multi-modal transportation issues which the City has permitted to develop due to its failure to stop BRAC, and its earlier approvals of density levels beyond what the transportation system can sustain.
  iii. Cap the development at current by-right levels, and permit them CDD projects to be implemented only when Planning Commission and Council can honestly

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state that the approval of a DSUP or a DSP will not threaten the health and general welfare of the area.

c. The High Capacity Corridor Study fails the test of good planning. Planning takes on chiefly 3 forms:

    i. "we have a problem – let's look at something to fix it." This is planning which is too short-sighted.

    ii. "I have a good idea that worked somewhere else. Let's do that here." This is planning which presumes an answer. This is what the High Capacity Corridor Study has been doing.

d. The 3rd and proper form of planning is community-based, it is corrective of current problems, and anticipates future issues. It takes an open mind on appropriate solutions, and looks at transportation as an investment in the future of the community, one for which the costs are considered against a fair assessment of the benefits.

I'll be back to speak with you again on Item 12 with some ideas on what needs to be done to apply the guidance in this Recommended Practice so that any planning for the City's future transportation makes a positive contribution to our neighborhoods.