Planning Commission Meeting
July 14, 1994
Verbatim Excerpts

CP-86-C-121-2 - RESTON SPECTRUM LIMITED PARTNERSHIP

After Close of the Public Hearing

Commissioner Palatiello: So I beg the indulgences of my colleagues for a few comments. As was mentioned, Reston Town Center was rezoned by the Board of Supervisors in 1987 after receiving a favorable approval from the Planning Commission. The approved zoning permits great flexibility and discretion by the applicant to build residential, commercial office or retail on the land where the Spectrum is proposed. As part of that rezoning Reston Land proffered to bring to the Planning Commission a conceptual development plan for our review and approval and that is why we are here this morning. Since that rezoning, several development plans have been brought back to the Commission. Several of them were handled by my predecessors and the last one, Edge Water, I handled during my tenure on the Commission. In each case there is a brief staff memorandum and the items were handled under Commission Business. I'm the one to blame for the ordeal we have been through tonight and the length of this public hearing because I asked for a full staff analysis, a full staff report, a full public hearing because I thought it was necessary given the level of interest that this has received in the community. I mentioned before the excellent work that Cathy Chianese has done on this application and I want to emphasize that again. I'd also be remiss if I did not acknowledge the role that Jim Zook and Barbara Byron have played and the assistance that they have lent to me and I thank them as well. I would also be terribly remiss if I did not express my appreciation to Joan Dubois from Supervisor Dix's office as well as Supervisor Dix himself. This is an item that ends here at the Commission, does not go to the Board of Supervisors but Supervisor Dix has been of tremendous assistance to me and I, I thank him. I'd also like to acknowledge the great professionalism with which Mr. Calabrese has represented his client and his client himself. We have yelled and argued and discussed and debated but we finally came about with a, what I think, a very strong application, a much improved application and one that I think is worthy of support. To put things in perspective, as my colleagues know, the Town Center is a large area that stretches from the Dulles Access Road to the south to the Hechingers Plaza in the north from some parcels east of Reston Parkway to the future alignment of the Fairfax County Parkway on the west. It includes a library, a hospital, the government center, several residential communities and other existing buildings as well as the urban core. The entire Town Center is not the urban core; it is only that section along Market Street that most of us now call the Town Center but there is much more to it than that. To put this into perspective, the acreage of the Town Center district is greater than the Disney site in Prince William County. So this is no small application that we are discussing this evening. I held two community meetings on this application. I have worked with the PNZ task force, PNZ itself, and RCA. This application has been the subject of TV ads in Reston, petitions, as we were presented tonight, numerous newspaper editorials. I reviewed the 1987 rezoning. I read an extensive file of

newspaper clippings as I mentioned earlier that Mr. Stowers was kind enough to loan to me. I listened to the tape recording of the Planning Commission hearing. I reviewed the verbatim of the Board of Supervisors' hearing and I read the staff report from 1987. I discussed this application with several Restonians who were involved in the original process including members of the task force that were appointed by then Supervisor Pennino and then Commissioner Thillmann. Based on that research, I came to the conclusion that retail indeed was a permitted use on this site. I understand some of our neighbors would prefer other uses but the authority to select uses within certain perimeters was indeed provided in 1987 rezoning. We have also defined those perimeters through a proffer interpretation that the Planning Commission received a few weeks ago. I tried to come up with a catchy quote for this evening that would capture this situation. As a Virginian I tried to see what Jefferson might say and I couldn't find anything that fit. I reviewed Shakespeare and still nothing. The other morning I heard a song on the radio and I was struck by the words of that great commentator on the human condition, Mick Jagger, who said: "You can't always get what you want but if you try sometimes you just might get what you need." And I was struck by that quote because when I listened to the tapes of the Planning Commission hearing on the rezoning, one of the speakers was Charlie Smith who at the time was the President of the Reston Board of Commerce. He told the Commission then that there was need for a strong retail component in Reston; that Reston had not yet reached its goal of self sufficiency because people had to go to Tysons Corner or Fair Oaks for shopping. He said at that time that the Reston Board of Commerce supported the rezoning in order to complete the downtown of Reston. So this may not be what everybody wants but if the dream of Reston to be a place where one can live and work and play and shop is to be fulfilled, this indeed is what we need. So over the past several weeks and months it has been my effort to make this the best possible retail center. Once I got over the threshold issue of the use, I felt that what we should do is make this an excellent application and I think we've reached that point. A number of significant modifications have been made. I won't go through those this evening, they've been highlighted by many of the speakers. Before closing I want to also thank someone who is not here in this auditorium this evening who has also been of invaluable assistance to me. Someone who I really had the honor and pleasure of getting to know over these months and that is the founder of Reston, Robert E. Simon. Bob does not support this application and I respect his reasons for his opposition. However, in each meeting that I had with him he brought to me some components of this application that he thought were necessary. Things like community space, which we don't have in all of the village centers in Reston. We have community space in this application. He talked about parks and, in joking with my Italian-American background, talked about the great piazzas of Italy. But we have piazzas, places to gather, places to sit in this area. So I think we've made the improvements, these and many others. So I want to thank Bob for his inspiration and his guidance and assistance. I think with his input this indeed is a better project. With that in mind, Mr. Chairman, I MOVE THAT THE PLANNING COMMISSION APPROVE CP-87-6-121-2 (sic) TITLED THE SPECTRUM, PREPARED BY DAVIS AND CARTER AND DATED JUNE 6TH, 1994.

Commissioner Thomas: Second.

Chairman Murphy: Seconded by Mr. Thomas. Is there a discussion of the motion?

Commissioner Hanlon: Mr. Chairman?

Commissioner Downer: Mr. Chairman?

Chairman Murphy: Mr. Hanlon and then Ms. Downer.

Commissioner Hanlon: This is an application which I'm not, or an action at least, which I am not going to support. And it is with some regret because I think that, that this in some ways has been the best prepared or one of the best prepared applications I've seen with possibly, the Reston Town Center being a notable exception, and I thought that the discussion in favor was, was persuasive and it certainly does seem to me that I, I agree very much with Mr. Palatiello that once you get past the threshold of what it is we have here it's the very best specimen of that kind that I think can be done and I think that Ms. Chianese and Mr. Palatiello and everybody else who worked on this deserve a lot of credit for it. I thought the opposition as it was articulated tonight, not exclusively but I'd say especially by Mr. Stowers, was also well thought out. And it is sort of a tribute to Reston, in my view, that, that when we have these land use debates they are of a -- an awfully high quality and I think that's due to the experience that people in Reston have accumulated over a long period of time in working with Reston Land to create a community that's really unique. But basically, Mr. Chairman, I think that when you -- that this is a specimen of a kind of shopping center that, in my view, does not belong next to the Reston Town Center. I have not listened to the tapes of the original proceeding before us as recently by Mr. Palatiello but I certainly do remember what it was that was brought before us and my recollection far more corresponds to that that was described by Mr. Stowers than the plan that we have before us. I think that you really have here a clash between principles and the principle underlining the Reston Town Center was that we were going to do something bold; we were going to do something exciting; we were going to create a kind of an urban core in an urban area in Fairfax County and basically make up in that city the refrain that the original rezoning was that Reston was built the way it was and now it needed its downtown. What we see before us is not downtown. And it's not something that one normally expects next to downtown. I don't necessarily think, and I don't think Mr. Stowers thinks, that we have to -- should have -- or Reston citizens should have to go all the way to Fair Oaks or to Tysons to have the kind of shopping opportunities that they have here but it didn't seem to me that this is the right place. And I'm very much concerned that what we're seeing here is not really a support. I understand the arguments to the contrary and maybe they're right and I hope they are but this does not seem to me to support the downtown in Reston; it seems to me to contradict it and to move towards the automobile oriented suburbia that, that is, it seems to me,

antithetical to what was originally attempted to be accomplished here. We -- everybody sort of has to vote his conscience every once in a while and I recognize that, that, that tremendous strides have been taken to make this acceptable and to link it into the Town Center and I hope that in fact it will ultimately be supportive but I think that it's not and I am going to have to vote against it.

Chairman Murphy: Ms. Downer.

Commissioner Downer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I went and had a meeting a week or so ago with the applicant's attorney and the President of Reston Land and looked at this and it's certainly come a long way from what I first read in the papers and what I saw. And I guess listening tonight to the different people speak, I have to reflect back that I worked for Reston when Mr. Simon was still the head. I was there during the changeover when Gulf came in and I remember the concepts that we worked on so hard. I was in advertising and public relations and worked with the planners and listened to their ideals. And as much as I think that this has come a long way, I have to say too, I don't think it belongs in the core. I think if it were out a ways along a major highway and don't -- I don't think 606 is the major highway that I have in mind for it, and I had to relate it to Herndon where I live. If someone came in with a plan such as this to be right next to our downtown which we're still trying vainly to build up, what would I think about it? And I'd have to, I'd have to say just as Commissioner Hanlon did, it doesn't belong. And, you know, I really was, was thinking maybe I could support this but after listening to everything tonight and, and reflecting back I can't. And so, regrettably, I'm also going to have to vote no.

Chairman Murphy: Mr. Sell.

Commissioner Sell: Mr. Chairman. As Mr. Palatiello knows from our numerous conversations on this over the past few months that I shared some of the concerns that have just been articulated in the early going. However, after having looked at the staff report and reading the -- listening to the testimony I think that this is a supportable application. There's some things that leap out at me in the staff report that sway my judgment on this. I'd just like to read them to the audience and the Commission. "Retail is an approved land use in the Reston Town Center in general and on these sites in particular. In staff's opinion the Spectrum retail center is a complementary use within the overall Town Center district that will serve Town Center residents as well as the community as a whole." Just to extrapolate: " . . . out to the extensive use of landscaping, berming and decorative screen walls and an interesting four-sided building facade, the applicant has designed a unique retail center." And finally the staff report concludes, the last sentence says: "The Spectrum proposal in its specific location responds positively to the goals of the Town Center district to provide for complementary land uses, compatible site design among its component parts and is in keeping with the character, mass, height, scale, and use of the

surrounding developments, the approved development plan and the master conceptual plan." And that's what I was concerned about when we set out on this journey on this facility and it's the staff's, the professional staff's, opinion, who I don't always agree with and they know it, but in this particular case those are the things that we were trying to satisfy and it appears that it has been done and this is an overall part of the Town Center and it is complementary to what is happening in Reston so I'm going to support the application.

Chairman Murphy: I'm also going to support the application and I, I agree with what Mr. Sell said, I think he picked out a very appropriate passage in the staff report to recite to us and I think that those of us who have been on the Commission for a number of years and who have had changes in one respect or another in our districts, as time moves on, as space moves on, as the economy moves on, as things change, realize that some of the plans, the best made plans, sometimes have to be reexamined and looked at. And if the new plan is complementary to what is in existence, and I remember the public hearing very well when we did the Reston Town Center, I don't remember the words exactly on the retail uses but I do remember that that was an issue about will that kind of development be part of the Reston concept and the answer was maybe not now but it should be and will be in the future and maybe this isn't exactly what we meant then but it is what we have now and it is before us today and I think that if you're going to have a shopping center, this is about the best one I've seen and I think it will complement what is already in existence in Reston. And I think that the Town Center concept, with this in place as part of it, will add again and increase, I should say, this spirit of community that already exists in Reston, is something we all look forward to in our districts so I intend to support the motion. Mr. Baldwin.

Commissioner Baldwin: Mr. Chairman, I believe that I will concur with Mr. Hanlon's remarks. I would like to note this statement that is in the NV Commercial letter: "Unlike the casual shopping offered along Market Street, the pragmatic shopper is most interested in low prices and convenience." In today's world that translates into big box retailers with adequate parking; that's what's provided. I'm wondering if the pragmatic shopper of that sort will be around 10, 20 years from now, but I don't think so. I think that the Reston concept has a vision to serve that particular circumstance. I will not support.

Chairman Murphy: Further discussion of the motion?

Commissioner Thomas: Mr. Chairman?

Chairman Murphy: Mr. Thomas.

Commissioner Thomas: I also plan to support it; I align myself with your comments.

Chairman Murphy: Thank you very much. Further discussion of the motion? All those in favor of the motion to approve CP-86-C-121-2, say aye.

Commissioners: Aye.

Chairman Murphy: Opposed?

Commissioner Baldwin: No.

Commissioner Downer: No.

Commissioner Hanlon: No.

Chairman Murphy: The motion carries. Mr. Baldwin, Ms. Downer and Mr. Hanlon vote no. Thank you very much.

Commissioner Palatiello: Mr. Chairman?

Chairman Murphy: Mr. Palatiello.

Commissioner Palatiello: I'd like to thank all the citizens for coming out this evening. I want to thank my colleagues on the Commission for their patience with this long public hearing and finally I have a number of documents that I would like entered into the record that confirm and support the commitments made by the applicant.

Chairman Murphy: I, I think since we are passing out compliments and kudos this evening we would be remiss if we did not recognize Commissioner Palatiello. I know that this was an extremely difficult application. I know a lot was riding on it and the future of something that he holds near and dear to his heart and that's Reston. I think he did a wonderful job and I think he deserves our congratulations.

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(The motion passed by a vote of 7-3 with Commissioners Baldwin, Downer, and Hanlon opposed; Commissioners Hartwell and Strickland absent from the meeting.)

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