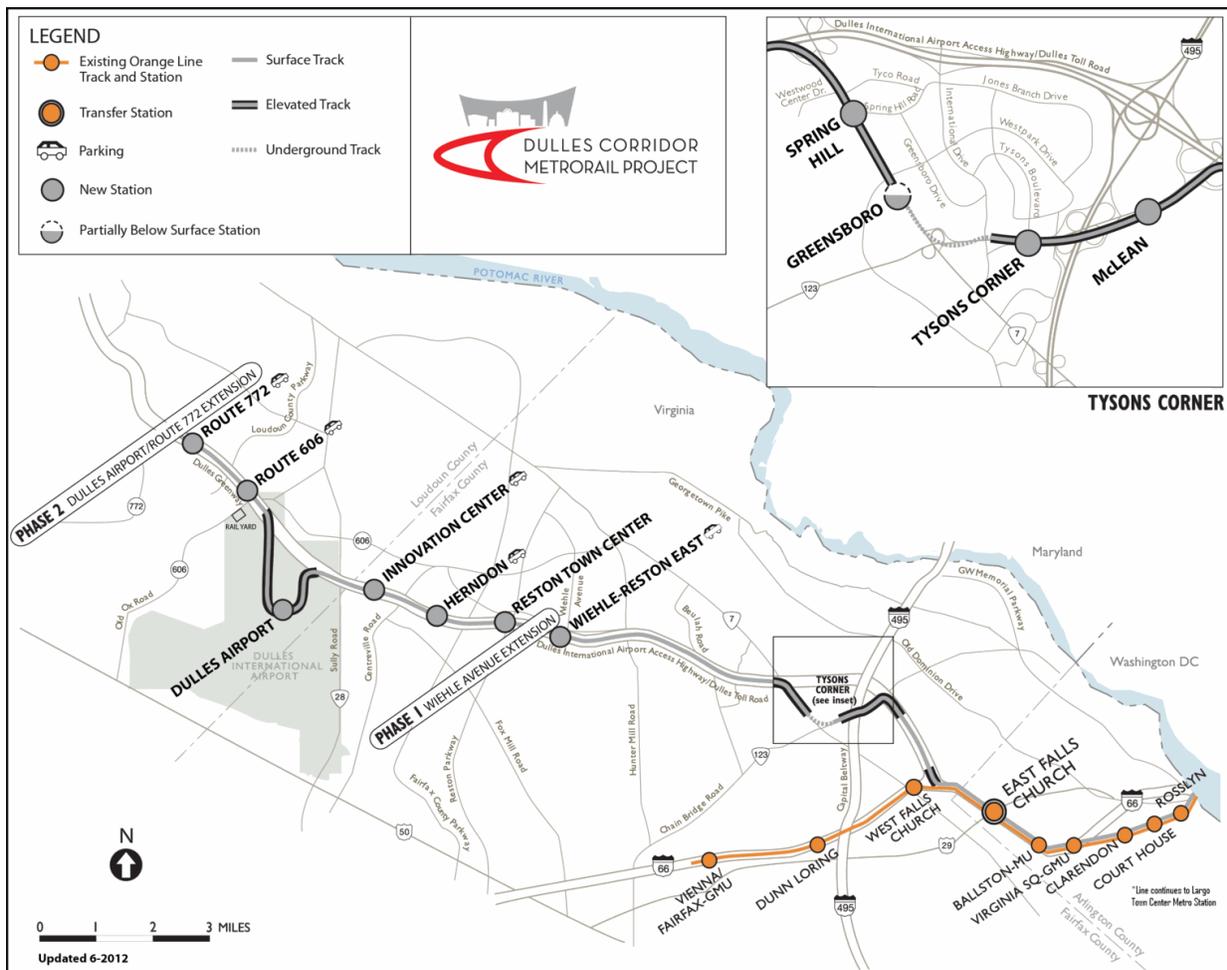


**Jobs-housing balance achieved in plans for massive,
new development near commuter rail stations in
Reston, Virginia—with EHI as a catalyst**

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The Equitable Housing Institute (EHI) played a key role in the achievement of “jobs-housing balance” by a Reston, Virginia, task force, in planning for major, new development and job growth in three new Metrorail (commuter rail) station areas there. Reston’s plans, adopted by the Fairfax County government in February 2014, include enough new housing to balance the 30,000 or more new workers who are expected to take jobs in those station areas by 2040.



Current and planned Metrorail stations west of Washington, DC, in Virginia—including Reston’s

Reston’s balanced development plans were unprecedented among Fairfax County’s transit-oriented developments (TODs). They showed a concern for housing needs that is all-too-rare in land use planning, but that is necessary if the United States hopes to reverse the major and ever-increasing problems its people face with housing affordability.

What “jobs-housing balance” is, and how it helps

True “jobs-housing balance” generally consists of one suitable housing unit for about every 1.5 jobs in the community.¹ (The average number of workers in an American household is about 1.5.) A “community” for this purpose is synonymous with the transportation term “commute-shed”—a compact geographic area in which residents normally can reach jobs in 30 minutes or less, even during peak commuting hours.²

Good planning involves minimizing commuting times and maximizing the availability of environmentally-friendly alternatives to automobiles (such as walking and bicycle paths). The consequences of failure to achieve true jobs-housing balance in an economically thriving community include destructive, urban sprawl—such as unnecessary road- and home-building in outlying (often rural) areas. Sprawl also leads to:

- more long-distance commuting and traffic congestion,
- resulting waste of fossil fuels for automobiles, which create climate-changing greenhouse gases,
- reduced green space to absorb rainwater and chemical runoff,
- increased soil erosion and water pollution, and
- destruction of natural habitats and wildlife and reductions in the abundance and diversity of bird species.³

An excess of jobs compared with housing units in a community also is associated with housing price escalation, displacement of low- and moderate-income people, increased poverty and homelessness.⁴

¹ See, e.g., American Planning Association (APA) Advisory Service Report No. 516, *Jobs-Housing Balance*, p. 4 (2003), available through: <https://www.planning.org/publications/report/9026849/> (“APA Report”) (general jobs-housing target standard is one housing unit for every 1.5 jobs in the community).

² See, e.g., Housing Partnership, *Jobs and Housing: Can’t Have One Without the Other*, Seattle, December 2005, pp. 1, 7 (“commute-sheds” are rough geographic designations for areas around employment centers “that can offer commutes of under a half hour to most of the major employment sites in the sub-region”). See generally, e.g., EHI, *Housing Shortages, Excessive Housing Costs, and Government Planning* (“EHI, *Housing Shortages*”), pp. 19-21 (Oct. 28, 2013) (citing examples); posted at: <https://equitablehousing.org/42-organization/142-ehi-analysis-of-fairfax-county-jobs-housing-report.html>.

³ See generally, e.g., EHI, *Housing Shortages*, *supra* note 2, at pp. 8-9.

⁴ See generally, e.g. *id.*, pp. 2-5.

How Reston’s plan achieved jobs-housing balance for its Metrorail-area development

The Reston planning was part of the extension of the Washington, DC-area Metrorail system to rapidly-growing western suburbs from Tysons Corner to Dulles International Airport, and ultimately into eastern Loudoun County. Fairfax County appointed a planning Task Force, composed mainly of residents and business people in Reston and nearby areas, to make recommendations concerning Reston’s three transit station areas (“TSAs”—approximately half-mile areas around Reston’s Metrorail stations). (Those three TSAs are Wiehle Reston East, Reston Town Center, and Herndon (South side, “Reston West”).)

A separate, County-appointed Working Group made planning recommendations concerning a fourth TSA, west of Reston (the Innovation Center Station at Route 28, South side). The County’s Dept. of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) provided guidance and information to both the Reston and Innovation Center planning groups.

Before EHI got involved, about a year into the planning effort, the jobs-housing mix under consideration by the Reston Task Force was the County planning staff’s framework. If adopted, that framework would have resulted in a jobs-housing ratio for overall new development much higher than the existing ratio in Reston as a whole (3.75:1 versus the current 3:1).⁵

EHI’s comments to that Task Force in Spring 2011 helped focus support among its members for including more housing. EHI provided the Task Force with detailed research and calculations on the effects of various amounts of housing in the mix.

In the end, at least 12,540 new housing units were added to the planning stage for Reston, after EHI got involved. That amounted to about 57 percent of the total of new housing units (22,140) planned for the Reston station areas.

At least 1,510 of the added units will be affordable to low- and moderate-income people, based on the percentages called for by the plan’s (and the County’s) Workforce Housing policy. (Depending on the number of total housing units ultimately built, more than 2,250 units might be “affordable.”)

Under those same policies, the anticipated non-residential growth in the Reston TSAs would generate contributions of more than \$111 million to the County’s housing trust fund.⁶ That fund

⁵ Under that framework, there would be about 8,000 new housing units and about 30,000 new workers by 2030. That housing proposal was based on the same figures contained in GMU Center for Regional Analysis, *Forecasts for the Reston/Dulles Rail Corridor and Route 28 Corridor 2010 to 2050* (July 26, 2010) (intermediate forecasts for numbers of households in 2030). See, e.g., Fairfax County DPZ, *Task Force Scenario Building Process*, pp. 4-7 (Nov. 9, 2010).

⁶ The County’s Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) for Reston’s station areas adopted a developer contribution policy similar to the one in the Tysons Corner Metrorail-area redevelopment plan. Under it: “Non-residential development in the TOD districts should contribute a minimum of \$3.00 per nonresidential square foot on total new development intensity.” The CPA calls for up to 37,265,000 square feet of nonresidential development in the station areas.

is used to stimulate production and preservation of housing affordable to low- and moderate-income people.

Together with the amount housing planned for Innovation Center, at least 15,840 additional housing units were put into the for those four TSAs, after EHI got involved. That's more than half the total number of new, planned housing units for those TSAs. Among those units are at least 1,900—and perhaps as many as 2,778—units that will be affordable to low- and moderate-income people. (Also, similar housing trust fund contribution policies were applied to the Innovation Center TSA, under the plan approved by Fairfax County in December 2013.)

Achieving true jobs-housing balance requires firmness

It took sustained determination by members of the Reston and Innovation Center planning groups to ensure that the increased housing remained in the final plans. There are strong political headwinds in Fairfax County, and other economically thriving areas across the United States, that favor limiting housing development, so that it fails to keep up with job growth.

Those headwinds need to be resisted effectively. Otherwise, Americans will suffer ever-increasing problems with hyperinflation in housing costs, displacement of low- and moderate-income residents, poverty and homelessness, and the destructive effects of urban sprawl.

For strategies to overcome those headwinds—by relieving the concerns of existing residents and voters (and thus, of local government officials) about permitting needed, new housing in their community—see, e.g., EHI, *Developing a better “carrot,” to induce residents to support needed, new housing in their communities* (June 2018), posted at:

https://equitablehousing.org/images/PDFs/PDFs--2018-/Pursuing_win-win_solutions_with_local_residents.EHI-6-2018.pdf.