



AGENDA ITEM #12

TO: Chairman Zimmerman and NVTC Commissioners
FROM: Rick Taube
DATE: June 25, 2009
SUBJECT: No NVTC Meeting in August, 2009

As a reminder, NVTC will not meet next month. The next scheduled meeting is September 3rd at 8:00 P.M.

Following adjournment of the July 2nd meeting, an optional 53-minute documentary will be shown on the history of smart growth planning and the ascendance of Metro in Arlington. This documentary includes materials loaned by NVTC.



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Every Edition

Bringing Development Into Focus; A Documentary Chronicles the History of Arlington's 'Smart Growth' Planning and the Ascendance of Metro

BYLINE: Jerry Markon; Washington Post Staff Writer

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Arlington County officials have long been proud of their "smart growth" strategy of clustering development at Metro stations and encouraging the use of public transit.

Now, they're telling the world about it.

The county recently completed a 53-minute documentary detailing the history of its fight during the 1960s and '70s to put as many Metro stops in Arlington as possible and avoid the suburban sprawl typical of neighboring counties.

A slickly produced combination of self-promotion and civics lesson, "Arlington's Smart Growth Journey" uses archival photos and on-camera stories to capture the urban planning approach that led to the Arlington of today.

"The other suburbs were terrified of Metro and thought it would bring all the problems of urban communities to their communities," said Mary Curtius, a county spokeswoman, in an interview. Curtius, a former Los Angeles Times reporter, did more than 25 hours of interviews for the documentary. "But Arlington was in danger of being overrun by commuters from Fairfax and Loudoun counties, and they looked at Metro as a lifeline.

"And it turned out to be this incredible tale."

Jay Fiset (D), vice chairman of the County Board, said he suggested the idea of the video to staff members about two years ago. "I wanted a simple educational tool, something that could be taken to civic association meetings," Fiset said. "We have so much turnover in our county, and a lot of the new people don't understand terms like 'smart growth' and 'transit-oriented development.'"

Curtius and other staffers approached the Arlington Virginia Network, the county's government-access cable TV

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unit, which records board meetings and produces shows about county issues. Producer Peter Hill said he became fascinated with "the story of how Arlington is what it is today because of some visionaries in the past" and how that journey happened.

After Curtius spent hours at the county's Central Library pulling archived documents and staff lists, filming began early last year. More than 20 current and former county officials, community activists and experts were interviewed, one of whom was 93. Two interview subjects died before production was finished.

Hill served as producer, director and editor, and he and other staff members balanced filming with their regular work, so no extra county funding was required.

As they delved into history, the filmmakers learned that the young, highly educated people who moved to Arlington after the Pentagon was built during World War II had strong feelings as planning for Metro began in the mid-1950s.

"It was a group of people who came here, settled here, started having families here, and didn't want to be paved over at a time when government was throwing money at highways and America was falling in love with the automobile," Hill said. "They fought that. They didn't want roads, they wanted a public transit system. Their way of thinking is very popular now, but at the time it was seen as almost anti-American."

Zachary Schrag, a George Mason University professor who wrote a book about the history of Metro, said Arlington's approach was indeed different from those of neighboring communities.

"Arlington saw 'smart growth' before other jurisdictions did," he said, not only because the county pushed for more Metro stops but also because it fought an initial plan to build the Orange Line entirely along Interstate 66. That would have been cheaper at the time but would have bypassed the county's commercial corridor and hurt plans to revitalize the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor.

The debate went on throughout the 1960s, but by the time the Orange Line opened in the late 1970s, Arlington had five stops -- Rosslyn, Court House, Clarendon, Virginia Square and Ballston. County officials and urban planners credit the decisions made in the 1960s for much of today's transit-oriented growth near the Metro stops.

"By getting in early, the county was able to get what it wanted," said Schrag, who is interviewed extensively in the documentary.

The finished product was first shown to local officials and civic leaders March 11 at Marymount University. A free public screening is planned for 7 p.m. May 11 at the Arlington Central Library.

The documentary can also be viewed on the county's Web site, and a DVD will soon be available in the store at Courthouse Plaza.

County officials said they hope that the documentary can be a learning tool for urban planners in Northern Virginia and nationwide.

Hank Hulme, a traffic engineer in the 1950s and later public works director, said that appearing in the video was "pretty cool."

"It brought back a lot of memories that I thought I had forgotten," said Hulme, 76. "When you look back at history, you get a different perspective. When you're living it, you just don't realize the importance."

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