

CRITIQUE OF DPZ'S "INITIAL RESPONSE" CONCERNING THE GLATTING JACKSON TRAFFIC ANALYSIS

July 25, 2006

We appreciate that DPZ has furnished responses to our written comments concerning the June 2006 Glattig Jackson Traffic Analysis (the Analysis) but must express great disappointment with the responses. This Critique is intended to be constructive and to advance the Master Plan for Columbia Downtown, in support of DPZ's impressive work up to this point.

Introduction

DPZ needs to continue to lead the master planning process whereas the July 21, 2006 Initial Response by DPZ in effect proposes to abandon any effort to have a long-term master plan. The Response suggests that in future, planning would continue to be done by GGP and other landowners as at present, through specific development proposals submitted in piecemeal fashion, with road improvements and amenities only as needed for the specific proposal. However, the findings of the Glattig Jackson Analysis provide an opportunity for long-term, comprehensive planning in the Rouse tradition, to include a Preliminary Traffic Study to guide future specific development proposals by landowners. We furnish some ideas to further that goal, and suggest below that the original level of envisioned development would support mass transit which in turn makes that level of development feasible.

We also strongly recommend that promulgation of the Master Plan and revised Zoning Regulations be deferred until further essential analyses are conducted and until the new County Council has become fully conversant with zoning and related issues.

Criteria for Master Plans

The purpose of master plans is to show, in a comprehensive manner, that land development would be supported by the public service infrastructure. An important aspect of master plans is a phasing plan, which requires that certain transportation projects must be programmed and funded before each phase of development can be approved by the County. DPZ's Response indicates there would be no long-term plan meeting these requirements.

Necessary Next Steps

Before going further DPZ needs to forge a partnership with the state Highway Administration (SHA), state Mass Transit Administration (MTA), and the county Department of Public Works (DPW) now, as well as other state or regional entities.

Requests to these agencies should be made now for commencement of studies involving state roads and local and regional mass transit, to ascertain the feasibility of the following possible solutions at a minimum.

1. Roads

a. Intercept traffic headed for Downtown destinations by establishing several satellite parking garages around the periphery of Downtown, served by free or low cost environmentally clean shuttle buses running every 10-15 minutes to Downtown and adjacent villages. Induce employees to use the satellite garages, by limiting parking spaces for Downtown office buildings. This can reduce traffic going through key Downtown intersections. Savings from reducing the amount of new parking facilities would be contributed by developers into a perimeter garage fund.

b. Divert commuter traffic which passes through Downtown to reach Route 29 to go to Washington, D.C. or Baltimore; determine the current volume and points of origin of such traffic and devise ways to enable that traffic to bypass chokepoint intersections.

c. Improve roads to avoid congestion at chokepoints and to facilitate crossing by pedestrians. Determine the feasibility of improvements for each major intersection and interchange. Show the impact of the traffic study's proposed new streets but delete the new north-south street in the Lakefront District that would pass through the wooded area near the "Hug" statute. Determine the feasibility of a full interchange at the S. Entrance Road/Route 29 intersection and ascertain whether Route 29 can be improved to carry the additional traffic. (Note: Walter Kulash stated he assumed 29 could handle all new traffic, but did not state the basis.)

2. Mass Transit

a. Evaluate mass transit improvement options, including types and locations of possible shuttle, local bus, bus rapid transit, light rail and Amtrack/MARC connections which can divert commuter traffic from Downtown. Bus rapid transit is the least costly and most feasible transit at this time. Residents already use commuter buses, Amtrack and MARC lines; the latter need to be connected to Downtown possibly along existing railroad rights-of-way and the unused right-of-way reserved for transit within Columbia. (Note: It is instructive that the two draft versions of the Glatting Jackson Analysis included mass transit options, which were deleted after DPZ review.)

b. Examine the level of development which can support various forms of mass transit. There is at least one mathematical formula which suggests that the original envisioned level of office development supports mass transit which in turn makes that level of development feasible without unacceptable traffic congestion.

Specific DPZ Responses

Almost all the responses sidestep our comments, unfortunately, as follows.

1, 2, 13. Road improvements assumed in the Glatting Jackson Analysis remain murky. For example, the responses state that the Analysis "includes road improvements suggested by Wells." Which are these? There is no mention of widening Little Patuxent north by four lanes. We need a full listing of these assumptions because it affects the proffered Options.

The response also indicates that any further traffic studies will occur only as part of the usual development application process, conducted by consultants retained and paid by developers who narrowly focus on adjacent impacts. This defeats the intent of a master plan which is meant to comprehensively design transportation and road improvements to meet the needs of the overall design of Downtown. Individual developers do not have the authority to arrange for mass transit, or for major road improvements/reconfiguration, although these measures are necessary to make a more urban Downtown workable. DPZ's leadership is needed, working under a master plan which includes specific transportation and road improvements. Otherwise uncoordinated, piecemeal development will continue.

3. We agree that S. Entrance Rd. and the Little Patuxent Parkway/Governor Warfield Parkway intersection need special study by DPW and SHA. However, we emphasize that this needs to be initiated now.

4, 5. The response relies on DPZ's proposal to allow up to 1600 Critical Lane Volume (CLV) for Downtown traffic; this would reduce our quality of life, causing traffic congestion, noise and air pollution. It would be unacceptable to motorists who would have to wait through two or more red lights at rush hour at key intersections. The response quibbles as to whether 1600 is an "E" or an "F" level of service (LOS). 1600 is the E level at its worst; 1601 is F, currently beyond the standard for both county and state roads. We are relieved to learn DPZ does not propose to make 1600 the allowable standard countywide; similarly, we do not agree it should be allowed in Downtown as the response proposes. We recommend a maximum of 1500 CLV, the standard in Rockville for example.

6. The response would leave it to developers to calculate the traffic volumes anticipated at any of the 12 key intersections, when they submit development applications for adjacent sites. Again, this process would abandon long-term planning for Columbia's Downtown by the county.

7-10 These responses are largely non-answers concerning the failure to assume the required 6% background traffic growth after year 3; the lack of data supporting the assumption that 83% of Downtown traffic is to or from Route 29; and other information missing from the Analysis. Instead, the response notes

that Glattig Jackson was not asked for an analysis at this level. Walter Kulash mentioned that he was asked to do "a quick and dirty" study. We understand there may be budget limitations and that the charrette effort is of a larger magnitude than anticipated. However, that does not make an incomplete Analysis an effective planning tool. Funds need to be obtained for an independent, experienced consultant familiar with urban planning and engineering to do a Preliminary Traffic Study before a master plan is promulgated. This analysis would include testing the impacts of mass transit improvements, as well as the effect of a system of satellite garages and shuttle buses as well as other road and transit related ideas; anything less is inadequate. The Preliminary Traffic Study would guide subsequent development proposals by landowners. The scope of work for the Study should be reviewed by the Focus Group.

11-12 These clarifications by DPZ are appreciated as are those which will be forthcoming from Walter Kulash. We acknowledge Mr. Kulash is a talented and dynamic traffic planner and that his study was intended to be limited although a fuller study is essential for the Master Plan to go forward.

Again, we encourage DPZ to continue in its leadership position and build on the momentum it has already achieved.

Respectfully submitted,

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