



Testimony on Franconia Triangle (SSPA 2023-IV-2S) Comprehensive Plan Amendment Before the Board of Supervisors, May 13, 2025

County goals and land-use patterns change. They have changed dramatically over the past 150 years.

After the civil war, quite a few freed Black families owned small farms and homes in communities across Fairfax County. A few of these communities, like Gum Springs and Tinner Hill, are still known, but many disappeared by WWII due to the appropriation of land for defense uses like the Pentagon and Ft. Belvoir and highways like I-395 and Rt 50.

After the war, subdividers rushed in to sell lots to White veterans with federal mortgages and education grants that catapulted them into the middle class. Many of these lots had racial deed restrictions that prevented sale to anyone “not of the Caucasian Race.” Eventually, most of the Black landowners lost or sold their land and moved elsewhere, leaving Fairfax County as a predominantly White suburb that resisted integration far beyond Federal court decisions about schools and laws about fair housing.

Last fall, following sweeping documentation by local historians of racial covenants on Fairfax County subdivisions, the Board of Supervisors ordered staff to check for such covenants on county properties. The first covenant found was on the property now being recommended for an affordable housing complex of 120 units at the site of the current Franconia Governmental Center.

Ironically, though Fairfax now has a sizeable population of international immigrants and lost its White majority status as of 2022,¹ a core of longtime civic leaders in the adjacent suburbs vehemently oppose any affordable—or, as they say, “low-income”—housing in their midst, even though it is located on a main street and is part of a larger development that they favor.

Given that these opponents say the affordable housing is too tall, yet favor town houses of the same height; that it is too dense, yet favor 93 new condos and townhouses at the same location; that its children would stress the schools, while not complaining about the children in the 93 other new homes, one begins to think that the objections might really be over the color or economic status of the affordable housing residents.

¹ Trends and Demographics, Fairfax County 2025 Adopted Budget Report, p 215.



At the Planning Commission hearings, residents argued that “this is not the right place for affordable housing,” that the Triangle plan was “Ok except for the government center housing” and that as taxpayers, they should decide the use of this government property, and the “use should benefit the immediate community.” That community was described as having a “nice suburban feel.”

Of course, local government has a duty to listen to the opinions of nearby residents regarding development proposals. Residents often suggest helpful modifications. But they are not entitled to decide the use of property. The Board, elected by the whole county, decides on the most appropriate land uses for the whole county.

Over the past decade, the Board has adopted policies that call for equitable development, equitable opportunity, and a stretch goal of 10K new affordable housing units by 2034.

As the commercial tax base dries up, the Board is trying to attract innovative companies that expect workforce housing, walkable neighborhoods, and transit options. Its land-use policy calls for larger and smaller housing-dense, mixed-use nodes connected by a web of transit and active transportation. Franconia Triangle is a small node in the future web.

We urge you to look to the county’s current economic and equity goals and pass the comprehensive plan amendment for the Franconia Triangle, including the affordable housing development.

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