Dulles Landing's Deceptive Campaign to Build Apartments

You may have received a piece of mail or seen something online from Dulles Landing titled “Destination Dulles Landing” about their future plans. The advertising encourages you to visit their website and submit comments to the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission opposing adoption of the updated Airport Impact Overlay District, which will be voted on this fall. Unfortunately, the material from Dulles Landing is quite deceptive and obfuscates their real intent - to build 600 apartments at the shopping center.

I’ve previously sent information about the Airport Impact Overlay District (AIOD). It has caused some confusion in the community. The bottom line is that the AIOD is a County zoning tool based on noise impact studies from the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority conducted using FAA guidelines. Consistent with FAA recommendations, the County restricts residential development in the highest noise impact areas. The AIOD has no impact on the operations of the airport - adopting it doesn’t “allow” more flights or more noise - it simply reflects what’s actually happening in the skies above us, and what is projected to happen in the future.

Matthew F. Letourneau
Dulles District Supervisor, Loudoun County Board of Supervisors
Member Finance, Government Operations and Economic Development Committee
Principal Director Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Board of Directors
Member Rt. 28 Transportation Improvement District Commission
Member Northern Virginia Transportation Commission
Member Transportation Planning Board
Member
The current Loudoun AIOD is based on a noise study from 1993 which is now out of date. A new noise study was finished at the end of 2019, and the County is in the process of updating our AIOD based on that study. And that’s where the dispute with Dulles Landing lies.

In the updated noise study, property along Route 50 near the Loudoun County Parkway intersection is being placed in the 65+ DNL noise corridor. The 65+ DNL does not permit residential development. In the case of the Dulles Landing property, the higher noise contour is not because of future growth of the airport, but existing traffic. If you've ever stood in the parking lot of Dick's Sporting Goods like I have many times, you'll see aircraft flying very low overhead and generating a lot of noise. The airport is just over the trees directly east of the property, so it is not a surprise that it is in the higher noise overlay district. Runway 30, which frequently sees departures to the west over this area, did not exist in 1993 when the previous study was done.

It is not a secret that Dulles Landing is struggling. I have been involved in trying to help the shopping center since before it even opened. Access has always been the major issue - there is no exit from the shopping center to Route 50 because it would require an acceleration lane on Route 50, and the developer believes it is too expensive for them to build. I absolutely believe that lack of access from the shopping center to Route 50 has hurt their traffic and we have had many meetings with their various representatives over the years about this issue. The County was able to accelerate Dulles West Boulevard and Arcola Boulevard by securing a proffer with a different developer to get those roads built faster. That should help the access issue from the west, but there still won’t be access to Route 50.

I have also heard from many residents that the mix of tenants at Dulles Landing is not what they are looking for. I am a big believer in supporting all our local businesses. While I recognize that being in the
retail and dining business is very challenging, we have seen repeatedly that certain restaurants and tenants do thrive in our community if they are providing what citizens are looking for. The County can’t control exactly which tenants go where, but I’ve been doing this job long enough to have a pretty good idea of what will succeed and I’m not shy about making suggestions to various developers. I also think that there has never been adequate signage for Dulles Landing. The Board approved better signage over a year ago, but management says they are working on tenant agreements before they can install it. It is somewhat inconceivable to me that the shopping center has been open as long as it has without real signage.

The plan that the Dulles Landing developers came up with for the future of the shopping center is to build 600 apartments on what was supposed to be commercial space - actually a restaurant park in their most recent approvals - on their property. They say that if they are able to do this, they would potentially be able to finance other parts of the project to bring additional components to the shopping center. I have made it absolutely clear to them - directly - that I am not going to support residential development in that location.

We get complaints about airplane noise from residents at Arcola Center which is further west; I can only imagine how loud it would be at Dulles Landing. The County’s 65+ noise restriction follows FAA guidelines for communities around airports and is based on research about the impacts of noise. Loudoun County has always honored these guidelines in order to protect quality of life for residents. We do have some residential areas of the County that have become 65+ after they were built, and we get lots of noise complaints from those residents. Furthermore, I am reluctant to give up commercial/retail space for more residential development given our longstanding infrastructure challenges. The space they have planned for these apartments is in the PD-CC-RC (Planned
Development-Commercial Center-Regional Center) zoning district.

I am fully committed to helping Dulles Landing in every way possible - as long as it actually makes sense. There is absolutely nothing from the County's perspective stopping the developer from bringing "highly desired recreation, entertainment, dining, shopping, and gathering spaces for outdoor concerts, farmers' markets, and community celebrations" (quoting from their mailing) today - nor has there been for the past decade. In fact, we would love for them to do this and I have even offered to explore ways that the County could assist with certain tenants that they are pursuing. The only thing that Dulles Landing can't do under the new Airport Impact Overlay District is build the 600 apartments. And that is why they have spent the money to mail all of you to tell you to contact us.

It should be noted that this situation will likely come up with other developers as well. The Avonlea application would have been affected by the change in the map, but the County Attorney advised that the Board cannot consider the new map until it is formally adopted and it was approved since it met the Comprehensive Plan guidelines and should provide some high quality development that we’ve been lacking. All applications that come to us after adoption of the AIOD (this fall) will need to meet the new guidelines. One of those applications is from Toll Brothers, who is seeking to put over 1,000 residential units behind the Home Depot which will not be permitted under the new AIOD, and they have also been pressuring the Board not to adopt it. There are portions of their property that fall outside of the 65+ DNL area, and I have encouraged them to rework their plans. Dulles Landing’s location is the closest of all to the airport and likely the most impacted by noise, which makes it incompatible with residential development.

My primary purpose in sharing this information is transparency. The Dulles Landing marketing
materials do not mention “apartments” or “residential,” so you wouldn’t really know what this is about. If you do support the 600 apartments in this location, then you certainly can let us know, and we may respectfully disagree - but at least now you have the facts.

As always if you have questions or wish to share thoughts with me, feel free to email me at matt.letourneau@loudoun.gov.

Did someone forward this to you? Click below to sign up to receive future updates directly.