

FITZGERALD – SAUL WHITE FLINT PROPOSAL

TO: White Flint Advisory Group Members

FROM: Bob Wulff, B. F. Saul Company

DATE: November 13, 2007

RE: **Suggestions to Guide Your Stewardship of the White Flint Sector Plan**

1. **DON'T UNDERESTIMATE WHAT WHITE FLINT CAN BECOME.** The White Flint area has more upside potential than any place in our region due to the unique constellation of three attributes: a Metro Station, location next to built-out Bethesda and the Beltway, and lots of large, underdeveloped land parcels owned by top-quality developers. With proper planning to set the stage, the marketplace will transform White Flint into one of the National Capital Region's preeminent downtowns. A new downtown that will smartly accommodate the County's growth and provide an economic engine to fund County services.
2. **PLAN AND INCENTIVISE VERTICAL MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT.** Great urban places start with great streetscapes and great streetscapes start with compact development in the form of vertical mixed-use buildings: underground parking, ground floor retail/restaurant, and floors above for office, residential, or hotel—all at a high density to insure day and night traffic sufficient to support both neighborhood and destination retail. This is how County planners can create life between buildings.
3. **GREAT STREETSCAPES WITHOUT DENSITY WILL FAIL.** Density is a prerequisite. But what density? No simple formula, but densities below an FAR of 2.5 rarely result in great urban places. At a 3.0 and above great urban places evolve.
4. **AROUND A METRO STATION EVEN GREATER DENSITIES SHOULD BE REQUIRED.** Best Planning Practices routinely specify a 4.0 to 8.0 FAR within a 1/8 mile ring around a transit station (Arlington is now requiring an FAR of 10 at Rosslyn.) The next concentric ring of 1/8 to 1/4 mile should achieve 3.0 to 4.0 FAR. And 1/2 mile out, densities to a 2.5 FAR should be encouraged. In Montgomery County we already do this around our most successfully developed Metro stations: Silver Spring and Bethesda. Around both these stations out to the 1/4 mile ring there are numerous office buildings at FARs of 4.0 to 7.0 and these neighborhoods live and function very well. Even higher densities work extremely well around Arlington's Clarendon and Ballston stations.
5. **DO NOT FEAR DENSITY.** But won't such densities create crippling traffic congestion? No! Because placing dense office and residential buildings (15 to 20 stories) around Metro stations is SMART GROWTH because a high percentage of people who live and work near Metro use Metro rather than their car. The proof is just across the Potomac River in Arlington which has increased its development density around Metro over 100% while traffic increased only 16%. Why, because nearly 50% of residents near Metro rarely use their cars—39% take Metro and 10% walk.
6. **GIVEN PROPER FORM, DENSITY AT METRO IS YOUR FRIEND. DENSITY CAN RESULT IN DESIRABLE/LIVABLE URBAN VILLAGES WHERE PEDESTRIANS AND CARS ARE IN BALANCE.** Several such urban villages can be created within White Flint with the right Sector Plan. For example, the various development proposals from land owners in Neighborhood 2 provide a mix of complementary uses (office, neighborhood retail, residential at a variety of price points, fast and slow food restaurants, hotel, public space and new grid streets) that will create a self-sufficient neighborhood that will maximize pedestrian livability and minimize auto trips. But for this to happen will require a Sector Plan that encourages density above a 2.5 FAR.