



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

What's Next for Office Parks in Montgomery County?

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD

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 **Urban Land
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Executive Summary

This TAP comprises two separate study areas, both located in North Bethesda, Montgomery County, Maryland. The study areas are about a mile and a half apart, and are each undergoing a separate master planning process led by the Montgomery County Planning Department, as directed by the Montgomery County Council. For the purposes of this TAP, the study areas are referred to as Executive Boulevard and Rock Spring. Both study areas have common characteristics, the most prevalent of which is the overwhelming prevalence of office space, and the increasing vacancy rates in these office spaces.

As part of new master plan efforts for Executive Boulevard and Rock Spring, the Montgomery County Planning Department approached ULI Washington to conduct a TAP that would determine how to make these two office parks economically competitive and generators of the tax revenue needed to support public facilities and services.

Office space trends are shifting. By and large, tenants are changing where their office space is located. Often, this relocation is rooted in the “flight to quality” away from Class B or C office product and towards Class A office product. The market perception of the study area locations, combined with the age of their products, and the nearby amenity base characterize the products in both study areas as Class B and C space. According to the Panel, this product type does not possess the features most commonly sought by prospective office tenants. Nevertheless—and importantly—the office product in both study areas are locationally viable, and in some cases, locationally vital.

Though they are geographically separated, the study areas possess many parallel challenges. The Panel grouped these challenges into four categories: connectivity, identity, amenities, and land use. In order to maximize the vitality of these study areas, the Panel provided a host of recommendations for both Executive Boulevard and for Rock Spring.

Background and Scope

This TAP comprises two separate study areas, both located in North Bethesda, Montgomery County, Maryland. The study areas are about a mile and a half apart, and are each undergoing a separate master planning process led by the Montgomery County Planning Department, as directed by the Montgomery County Council. For the purposes of this TAP, the study areas are referred to as Executive Boulevard and Rock Spring. Both study areas have common characteristics, the most dominant of which is the overwhelming prevalence of office space, and the increasing vacancy rates in these office spaces.



TAP STUDY AREAS

The two study areas of this TAP, Executive Boulevard (indicated by the western-most orange shading) and Rock Spring (indicated by the blue shading) serve as the study areas for this TAP. Located about a mile-and-a-half apart in Montgomery County, both study areas share common characteristics and are undergoing master planning processes. *Map Source: MNCPPC*

Office vacancy rates are the primary challenge facing both study areas. According to the TAP briefing materials, the Rock Spring office park has a vacancy rate of 21.6%, including three completely vacant buildings, totaling 482,000 square feet. The Executive Boulevard office park has a vacancy rate of 32.7%, including three individual buildings that are either fully or nearly fully vacant, totaling 535,000 square feet. Given recent trends, Montgomery County is concerned that the vacancy rates in these office parks (and, by extension, other similar areas within the County) will continue to increase.

This concern is justified. Marriott, a major tenant in Rock Spring and a large employer in Montgomery County, recently announced a desire to relocate its headquarters to a more walkable, transit-served, mixed-use environment with a mixture of uses that appeals to a new generation of employees. Should Marriott depart from Rock Spring, it would leave behind more vacant office space that will be difficult to fill. As part of new master plan efforts for Executive Boulevard and Rock Spring, the Montgomery County Planning Department approached ULI Washington to conduct a TAP that would determine how to make these two office parks economically competitive and generators of the tax revenue needed to support public facilities and services.

QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL

LAND USES AND REDEVELOPMENT

- » What are the potential short and long-term markets (Office, Residential, Retail, Maker-Use, Government, etc.)?
- » What are the opportunities and challenges in Rock Spring? What are the opportunities and challenges along Executive Boulevard?
 - Can these office parks be retrofitted to accommodate the anticipated future need for office space?
 - If so, what kind of office uses might be most successful?
- » If not, what other uses might be considered for these properties?
- » Is there a preferred mix of uses or a minimum amount of uses that might be considered in redeveloping an office park?

PLANNING AND ZONING

- » What surrounding uses or facilities impact the viability of these office parks?
- » What incentives/tools/zoning/planning strategies can be provided to encourage redevelopment?

TRANSPORTATION

- » Given the lack of Metro-access to Rock Spring, what will it take for any future development or adaptive re-use to thrive?

GENERAL

- » What have we missed?

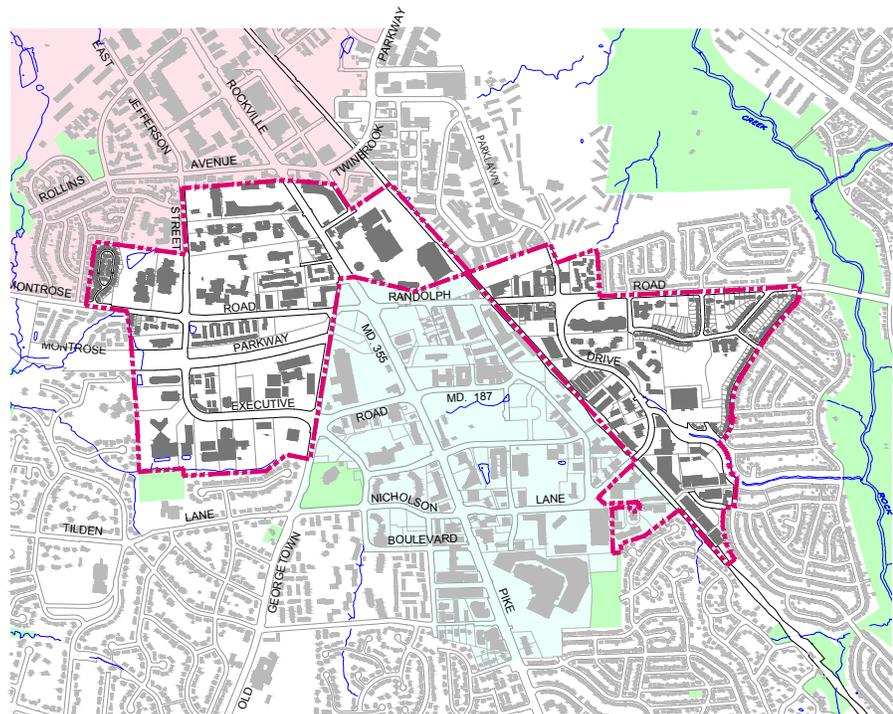
The Executive Boulevard and Rock Spring Study Areas

EXECUTIVE BOULEVARD

The Executive Boulevard area of White Flint is located in the western portion of the 455-acre White Flint 2 Sector Plan, and is bounded by Old Georgetown Road to the east and Montrose Road to the north. Overall, the greater area is transitioning from an auto-oriented, suburban development pattern into a more urban area where people walk and bike to work, to shops, to services, and to transit. The Executive Boulevard area is served by the White Flint Metrorail station.

EXECUTIVE BOULEVARD STUDY AREA

The Executive Boulevard study area is located in the western-most portion of the White Flint 2 Sector Plan. *Map Source: Montgomery County Planning Department*



Large office buildings are concentrated along Executive Boulevard. Most of these office buildings are set back from Executive Boulevard, and are situated behind large surface parking lots that are sandwiched between the building and the street. Additionally, mature trees, manicured sidewalks, and large, auto-oriented blocks characterize the area. The office uses are zoned EOF, Employment Office; a new zone that was established as part of the zoning code rewrite which was adopted by the County in October 2014.

Historically, Montgomery County's most densely developed areas have been the down-County centers nearest Washington, D.C. The County has been reexamining its centers, and is exploring locations that could accommodate future growth. In select areas, the County's suburban centers are evolving and redeveloping into more urban nodes with opportunities to live, work, and play within walkable communities. Executive Boulevard is immediately adjacent to one of these evolving areas.

ROCK SPRING

The central portion of the Rock Spring Master Plan is a conventional suburban, auto-oriented office park, which is bounded by I-270 on the west, the I-270 spur on the north, Rockledge Drive on the east, and Democracy Boulevard on the south. The majority of office buildings in Rock Spring were built in the 1980s and 1990s. Office buildings in Rock Spring are substantially larger than other areas; on average, they are twice the size of office buildings elsewhere in the County.



ROCK SPRING STUDY AREA

The Rock Spring study area is bounded by I-270 on the west, the I-270 spur on the north, Rockledge Drive on the east, and Democracy Boulevard on the south. The Rock Spring office park contains 30 buildings with 5.3 million square feet of space. *Map Source: TAP briefing materials*

Major tenants within Rock Spring include Marriott International, Lockheed Martin Corporation, IBM, Host Hotels and Resorts, and the National Institutes of Health. Several buildings contain mostly medical offices. Retail uses are located west and east of the office park.

On the east side, the Rock Spring Master Plan area includes Georgetown Square and the Wildwood Shopping Center. Georgetown Square is located on the northwest corner of Old Georgetown Road and Democracy Boulevard and includes Giant, a DSW shoe store, a restaurant, and ancillary retailers. Wildwood Shopping Center is located east of Old Georgetown Road, north of Cheshire Drive, and west of Berkshire Drive. It includes a specialty grocer, Balducci's, a CVS, and a variety of small retailers in a strip-style center. Adjacent to the Wildwood Shopping Center to the north are a gas station, a bank, and a medical office building.

The first residential units within the Rock Spring area were completed in 2004, and include a 386-unit multi-family development located adjacent to the I-270 spur between Rockledge Drive and Old Georgetown Road. More residential units are in the pipeline: residential developer EYA is currently constructing a 168-unit townhouse development on the northwest corner of Fernwood Road and Rock Spring Drive, across from the Marriott's headquarters. In addition, a 340-unit multi-family high-rise residential building has been approved on a parcel on the north side of Westlake Terrace across from Westfield Montgomery Mall, at the site currently occupied by Ourisman Ford.

Walter Johnson High School is also located in the Rock Spring Master Plan area, with primary access from Rock Spring Drive. The high school, which opened in 1956 and was revitalized in 2009, sits on nearly 31 acres. According to Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), current enrollment at Walter Johnson High School is 2,295 and the school's capacity is 2,335. MCPS is currently conducting a feasibility study to analyze the potential for adding classrooms to the high school.

With its location adjacent to I-270 and near I-495, Rock Spring is well served by roads, but not by transit; the closest Metrorail station, Grosvenor, is 2 miles away. Two major infrastructure projects greatly improved vehicular access to and around Rock Spring: the interchange at the I-270 spur and Rockledge Boulevard and the Westlake Terrace bridge over I-270. Multiple existing bus routes and shuttles run throughout the area. Finally, the 2013 Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan included the North Bethesda Transitway and four proposed stations within the Rock Spring Master Plan area.

Challenges for Both Study Areas

Though they are geographically separated, the study areas possess many parallel challenges. The Panel grouped these challenges into four categories: connectivity, identity, amenities, and land use.

CONNECTIVITY

Both study areas are characterized by a conventional—and increasingly outdated—suburban development pattern: they are almost exclusively auto-oriented office parks with significant pedestrian challenges. In both cases, accessing the site for a pedestrian or cyclist is either uninviting, unsafe, or both. Both sites are surrounded by and accessed through multi-lane roads that invite high traffic speeds. The blocks in both study areas are large “super-blocks” that are scaled towards automobile traffic. Furthermore, traversing to spots within each study area is fraught with pedestrian challenges; in both cases, internal connectivity is neither intuitive nor inviting.

IDENTITY

Both study areas suffer from identity challenges. The Panel continuously cited that the study areas lack a sense of place; that “there is no THERE there.” In essence, the study areas lack distinguishing characteristics that might differentiate them from other office parks in the County or the region. Further, these “placeless places” are disconnected from any amenities, especially for pedestrians.

AMENITIES

The dearth of amenities in both study areas contributes to the sense of placelessness. Executive Boulevard and Rock Spring are both non-amenitized office parks; destinations that harken back to development patterns of the mid-20th century. In effect, office tenants in these study areas have access to very little other than their offices. Absent from these study areas are restaurants, coffee shops, gyms, drug stores, and other neighborhood-serving retail, although in some buildings, interior amenities for employees are available.

LAND USE

Offices dominate the existing land uses in both study areas. The lack of diversity contributes to the identity challenge faced by both study areas. In their current state, the Executive Boulevard and Rock Spring study areas are office-only destinations that largely see workers arrive by car in the morning, and depart by car in the evening, with very little other activity in between.

Changing Trends in Office Space

To set the stage for a conversation about the two study areas, the Panel discussed the context of the shifting nature of office space at the macro level. By and large, people are changing where their office space is located. The Panel analyzed existing industry research on office uses. Based on this analysis from 2000–2008, the rate of tenant relocation at the expiration of a lease was 40%. By contrast, between 2009 and 2014, the rate of tenant relocation at the expiration of a lease jumped to 60%. These trends show that, over the last five years, tenants are largely choosing to relocate to new office space, rather than remain in place.¹ These moves are often driven by the changing way office space is used, including prioritization of amenity-rich and transportation-accessible locations.

Often, this relocation is rooted in the “flight to quality” away from Class B or C office product and towards Class A office product. The substantial shift in absorption rates between 2008 and 2014 prove this overall preference for higher quality space: data shows that absorption for Class A product was 18.6 million square feet, whereas absorption for Class B and C product was –13.6 million square feet.² The Panel suggested that preferences towards higher quality space are due, in part, to office clients placing a greater emphasis on their corporate identities as well as locating in areas where there is a high amenity base. The move to new space is viewed as essential in attracting the new generation of workers. The Panel’s research further indicates that 86% of

¹ Newmark Grubb Knight Frank (NGKF) is a commercial real estate advisory firm that put forth a study in September 2015 titled “Suburban Office Obsolescence.” This study, including its data and overall relevance to the TAP, served as a foundational element in the Panel’s formation of its recommendations. To view the study, visit: <http://www.ngkf.com/Uploads/FileManager/NGKF-White-Paper-Suburban-Office-Obsolescence.pdf>. To learn more about NGKF, visit: <http://www.ngkf.com/home/research/thought-leadership>.

² <http://www.ngkf.com/Uploads/FileManager/NGKF-White-Paper-Suburban-Office-Obsolescence.pdf>.

Both the Rock Spring and Executive Boulevard study areas possess over 20% office vacancy. By contrast, neighboring Bethesda/Chevy Chase, which contains largely desirable Class A office product, possesses only 9.4% office vacancy.

lease activity occurs within a ½ mile of a metro station, which represents a big shift from previous trends, where lease activity was less reliant on proximity to public transportation.

Office vacancy rates in the remainder of Montgomery County tell a similar story. According to the Panel’s research, Montgomery County in 2015 had nearly 11 million square feet of vacant office space. Office vacancies in submarkets of Montgomery County are listed below.

OFFICE SPACE VACANCY IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

NEIGHBORHOOD	PERCENTAGE VACANCY
Rock Spring	21.2%
Executive Boulevard Area	29.2%
Montgomery County	14.8%
Bethesda/Chevy Chase	9.4%

Relative to other comparably sized jurisdictions in the region, Montgomery County has been less successful in retaining corporate headquarter offices. Based on the Panel’s research, over the past six years, eight Fortune 500 companies located their headquarters in Fairfax County, and only one such company left Fairfax County to locate elsewhere. In Montgomery County over the last six years, by contrast, zero Fortune 500 companies have located in the County, and zero have left to go elsewhere. A critical element of economic development for both study areas will be attracting new tenants while also maintaining existing tenants. According to the Panel, the County must be aggressive in catalyzing economic development in these study areas. Waiting for the market to naturally absorb itself will not yield productive growth.

According to the Panel’s research, approximately 16% of suburban office space in the Metropolitan Washington Region is determined to be obsolete.³ Office space obsolescence is a layered challenge, however. Some issues related to office space obsolescence—such as proximity to amenities—are curable; other challenges are not. While the phenomenon of challenged suburban office product is not unique to Montgomery County, a specific challenge for these study areas is that demand for their office product is severely constrained. The market perception of the study area locations, combined with the

³ <http://www.ngkf.com/Uploads/FileManager/NGKF-White-Paper-Suburban-Office-Obsolescence.pdf>.

age of their products, and the nearby amenity base characterize the products in both study areas as Class B and C space. According to the Panel, this product type does not possess the features sought by prospective office tenants.

Nevertheless—and importantly—the office product in both study areas is locationally viable, and in some cases, locationally vital. For instance, both Executive Boulevard and Rock Spring are located in areas with access to highly rated schools and other desirable demographics, according to the Panel. Similarly, both areas are easily accessible by major roads and arterials, and are centrally located in Montgomery County. Therefore, the focus of the Panel’s recommendations consider these office products within their larger contexts—including the nearby amenity bases—in order to develop ways to improve conditions and make them attractive to potential tenants.

Recommendations

EXECUTIVE BOULEVARD

EXISTING CONDITIONS

In order to develop recommendations to improve the Executive Boulevard portion of the study area, the Panel first analyzed the area's existing conditions. The area enjoys and is surrounded by tremendous assets, including the Pike & Rose mixed-use development, a major convention center and hotel complex, and proximity to the White Flint Metrorail station. The area's connections to these assets, however, need to be improved. For instance, the Panel expressed concerns that the multi-lane intersection of Executive Boulevard and Old Georgetown Road creates an uninviting and unsafe pedestrian experience to access the study area. Furthermore, while the handsome streetscape environment along Executive Boulevard is well maintained, it is oriented towards automobiles, not pedestrians.

EXECUTIVE BOULEVARD TAP STUDY AREA

The area outlined in red illustrates the boundaries of the Executive Boulevard Study Area
Map Source: ULI Washington





-  AMORPHOUS INTERSECTION
-  ACTIVITY NODES
-  PEDESTRIAN ROUTES
-  SURFACE PARKING
-  RESIDENTIAL
-  CONNECTION POINTS

CONNECTIVITY

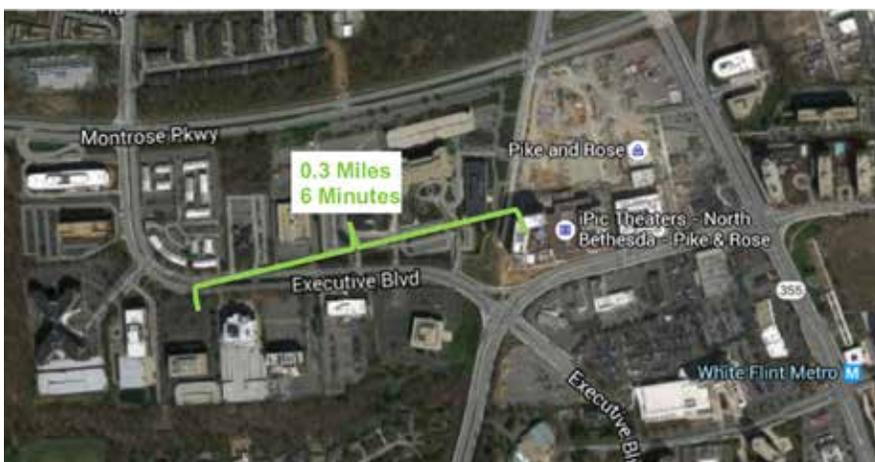
Connectivity to offsite amenities from the Executive Boulevard study area is largely automobile oriented and pedestrian challenged. Though the White Flint Metro station is only $\frac{3}{4}$ mile away—about a 15-minute walk—the routes to and from the site are circuitous and confusing. The lack of obvious connection has caused pedestrians to create an informal “goat trail” through parking lots, and there is evidence of people walking through landscaping to shorten the formal connection between the Metro and the study area. Auto-oriented crossings—particularly at Old Georgetown Road and Executive Boulevard—add to the connectivity challenge and create uninviting pedestrian experiences to access the site.

Additionally, the way the buildings address Executive Boulevard renders the site nearly inaccessible to pedestrians. Because pedestrian access was not designed into the site, pedestrians are forced to access the front door of most buildings through driveways and parking lots, rather than on sidewalks and designated footpaths. Finally, although walking to Pike & Rose from the study area only takes six minutes, the experience is perceived to be much longer due to the site’s unfriendly pedestrian conditions. As a result, the site is experiencing a diminished opportunity to take advantage of this nearby amenity.

EXISTING CONDITIONS ALONG EXECUTIVE BOULEVARD

In this rendering, the blue shading indicates auto-dominant areas that largely monopolize the study area. The Panel advocated for making improvements that better connect the area to surrounding amenities, particularly for pedestrians.

Photo credit: ULI Washington



PERCEPTION VS. REALITY

While walking to Pike & Rose from the study area only takes six minutes, the experience is perceived to be much longer due to the conditions within the site itself.

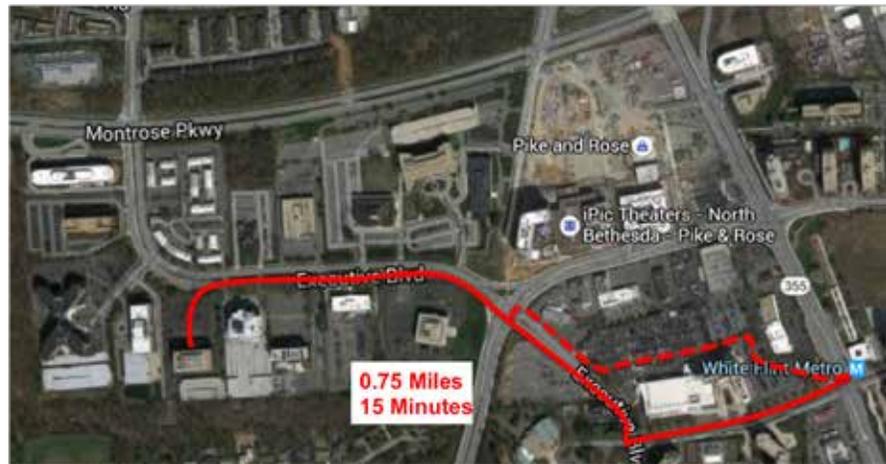
Map source: ULI Washington

TOP
PEDESTRIAN
EXPERIENCE
FROM METRO

The solid red line shows a confusing and circuitous formal pedestrian path from Metro to the office destinations along Executive Boulevard. The dotted line indicates an informal “goat trail” that has formed through a parking lot to shorten the walking experience. *Map Source: ULI Washington*

BOTTOM
AERIAL VIEW
OF OLD
GEORGETOWN
ROAD AND
EXECUTIVE
BOULEVARD

This auto-oriented intersection, with its channelized right-turn lanes, and high car speeds, creates an intimidating and uninviting pedestrian experience to access the study area. *Image Source: Google Maps*



Enhancing connectivity to area amenities will require prioritizing infrastructure improvements. The Panel recommended accelerating the implementation of new White Flint Metro Station entrance and implementing the planned Old Georgetown Road and Executive Boulevard realignment. This street realignment, also known as the Western Workaround, in concert with plans for a new White Flint Metrorail station entrance, which will be one block north of the existing station entrance, will vastly improve pedestrian access to the area. In addition to creating a more obvious street grid, the realignment will tighten up the intersection of Old Georgetown Road and Executive Boulevard by ridding it of the channelized turn lanes. The realignment will also create a



NEW WHITE FLINT METRORAIL STATION ENTRANCE

Plans for the new entrance to the White Flint Metrorail station will be one block north of the existing metro station, and will make access to the site from metro (shown in green) more direct than what exists today (shown in red).

Map source: ULI Washington

continuous corridor that decreases the distance and time it will take to walk from the new White Flint Metrorail station entrance to the study area. Rather than a 15-minute, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile walk between the Metrorail station and the study area, pedestrians will instead experience a 10-minute, $\frac{1}{2}$ mile walk between the Metrorail station and Executive Boulevard. Pike & Rose will serve as an intermediate landmark along the way, making the perception of the pedestrian experience more tenable.

Panelists also recommended leveraging and linking to the existing White Flint recreational loop, as well as extending the pedestrian amenities—such as shared use trails—that already exist in neighboring White Flint. Finally, Panelists recommended introducing Capital Bikeshare to the study area, which can serve as a multimodal connector.

IDENTITY

The feeling of a “placeless place” pervades the study area. There is not a lot to attract people to the site other than the single office uses. However, Pike & Rose is a major nearby asset. The Panel recommended leveraging this asset as much as possible by linking the study area’s identity to it. One way to accomplish this is by creating consistent wayfinding and an overall streetscape package, which would contribute to a more uniform identity for the larger area. This streetscape package would contribute to creating a corridor of activity that naturally connects Executive Boulevard to Pike & Rose.

AMENITIES

The local experience in the study area is generally unpleasant due to the lack of amenities.⁴ Furthermore, the ability to walk to the nearby amenities—like the restaurants at Pike & Rose—feels prohibitive due to unpleasant pedestrian connections, like limited access from the street.

This amenity desert creates a great opportunity: anything that diversifies the area's uses will benefit the area. The Panel recommended that the local experience would be improved by introducing neighborhood-serving retail that caters to the area's office workers—such as coffee shops, cafes, drug stores, and dry cleaning services. Panelists also recommended taking action to decrease the perceived distance between building entrances and street. One way to accomplish this, over the long term, is to encourage small floor plate retail in street-facing surface parking lots. In the shorter-term, the surface parking areas could be used as places to implement pop-up amenities, such as food trucks, coffee shops, or parklets. Either approach would create a street wall of retail, which would activate the area. Adding outdoor movable seating can further activate the space, and create gathering spots for office workers, thereby encouraging people to go outside and interact with each other, rather than return to their desks for lunch.

The Panel also recommended embracing and enhancing the ample existing green spaces within the study area. The mature trees and existing landscaping are major assets, but are uninviting to pedestrians in their current state. Adding picnic style seating amidst the trees is one way to make this asset more inviting. Another suggestion—activating a trail system amidst the green

EXISTING GREEN SPACE IN STUDY AREA

There is ample existing greenspace in the study area, which the Panel recommended could be used to create a trail system.

Image Source: ULI Washington



⁴ Panelists acknowledged that some of the office buildings may contain small retail shops, but contended that because these uses are not obvious from the street, the perception of the overall dearth in amenities persists.

space—can also add a wellness benefit to the area as well as provide connections to neighboring residential areas to the south.

LAND USE

According to the Panel, the only way to enhance the existing land use in the area is to add diversity. In addition to providing neighborhood-serving retail, the Panel also recommended considering converting some of the existing properties. Two narrow buildings in the southwest portion of the study area, in particular, are favorably oriented towards each other. Consequently, these buildings might present possibilities for a conversion to a residential use. Should this conversion occur, the remaining parking designated for the area would be at a surplus, and could therefore provide an opportunity for additional stick-built residential construction. The Panel emphasized that anything Montgomery County can do to encourage and facilitate an added mix of uses—including repurposing existing buildings—would significantly enhance the character and viability of the study area.



EXECUTIVE BLVD FRAMEWORK PLAN

This rendering shows the areas of opportunity for Executive Boulevard. Introducing more urban street intersections, shown with red stars, will create inviting and safer pedestrian options. Building out the intersection of Old Georgetown Road and Executive Boulevard can also enhance the area’s identity by better linking it to Pike & Rose and to other amenities that are close to the Metrorail station. Additionally, the pleasant configuration of the southwestern most buildings, indicated in orange, presents an opportunity to convert office uses into residential, thereby diversifying the area’s land uses. Turning the existing green space into parks and trails can add enhancements and connections to nearby residential areas. Finally, activating the parking lots between the buildings and the Executive Boulevard can create a retail wall, which will enhance the amenity base for the area. *Image source: ULI Washington*

-  ENTRY EVENTS
-  PARK/ PLAZA
-  PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS
-  CROSSWALK IMPROVEMENTS
-  RESIDENTIAL CONVERSION
-  REDEVELOPMENT/ INFILL/ ACTIVE CENTERS

ROCK SPRING

EXISTING CONDITIONS

In order to develop recommendations to improve the Rock Spring study area, the Panel first analyzed the area's existing conditions. The area enjoys excellent vehicular accessibility with four major entry points, and is the closest corporate environment in Montgomery County to Northern Virginia. Geographically, the Panel thought the area is "locationally golden" in that it enjoys direct access to both I-495 and I-270, and by extension, is easily connected to other areas throughout the region.

Yet, because of its pedestrian connectivity challenges, Rock Spring is not being maximized to its fullest potential. For instance, like the Executive Boulevard study area, the Rock Spring study area enjoys a tremendous nearby asset in the Westfield Montgomery Mall (the mall). However, in spite of its immediately adjacency, the mall is difficult to access because of the unfriendly pedestrian connection over I-270. In addition, although the area is characterized by a lot of open green space, connections between the green areas is lacking. As a result, the residents in the nearby neighborhoods cannot enjoy access to these park areas, rendering the study area's parkland underutilized. Finally, while the Panel acknowledged that the EYA residential redevelopment site would change the character of the area, Panelists also recognized that this change will occur over time, and posed several recommendations that could catalyze change in the more immediate term.

ROCK SPRING EXISTING CONDITIONS

The blue areas, which signify parking areas, combined with the white areas, which signify buildings, illustrate that this is a very low-density area. This low-density asset, combined with the ample green space, holds great promise to be better utilized.

image source: ULI Washington

-  AMORPHOUS INTERSECTION
-  ACTIVITY NODES
-  PEDESTRIAN ROUTES
-  SURFACE PARKING
-  RESIDENTIAL
-  CONNECTION POINTS



CONNECTIVITY

Although the area enjoys superior vehicular access, Rock Spring is one of the most difficult places for pedestrians and cyclists to access. The Panel provided a host of recommendations that could improve the area and make it easier to use. First, the Panel acknowledged that the area is well served by bus service, and recommended that this service be improved so that it is easier for users. Transit technology tools that enhance rider knowledge of service would improve the user's experience and overall reliability on the bus as a viable transit option. Second, the Panel recommended creating a shuttle service between Rock Spring and nearby amenities, including the Metrorail station and the mall. Collaborating with property owners of the mall and in the study area could be the starting point to creating this direct shuttle service, which should be frequent, non-stop, reliable, and easy to use.

Panelists lamented the poor pedestrian connections between Rock Spring and the mall. Walking from Rock Spring to the mall requires crossing a bridge over I-270, which has narrow sidewalks that are adjacent to vehicles moving at high speeds. Creating a connection that is friendlier and safer for pedestrians is critical to creating access to the mall. The Panel cited several examples of bridge connections that provide safe and enjoyable pedestrian experiences while also providing a strong, multi-modal connection between two destinations. The Wilson Bridge Trail, for instance, is approximately 60-70 feet wide and includes multi-use trails that provide a strong connection for pedestrians and cyclists to cross the base of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. Creating a connection that has a more park-like setting will not only enhance the connection, but also invite more people to walk between Rock Spring and the mall.

The Panel also recommended adding Capital Bikeshare stations throughout the study area as a way to improve internal connectivity as well as provide connectivity options between Rock Spring and the mall.

Scaling the pedestrian experience is also a key component in improving overall connectivity. Currently, the Rock Spring area is composed of several auto-oriented "superblocks." Breaking up these large blocks with mid-block crossings will create a more inviting pedestrian experience. One recommendation to accomplish this is to create a more direct crossing between the study area and the mall by adding a connection through the Marriott property. The Panel acknowledged the expense and potential controversy involved in this suggestion, but also contended that such a crossing would decrease the time and distance of the walk between the study area and the mall. Pedestrians would enjoy a reduction from a 15-minute, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile walk to a 5-minute, $\frac{1}{4}$ mile walk. This improved connection between the two areas would also create a better overall vision for the site and its surrounding areas.



The Woodrow Wilson Bridge Trail provides an example of a wide large bridge-crossing that includes a multi-use trail. *Image source: ULI Washington*

Shortening the pedestrian connection, as illustrated by the green line, would enhance the overall connectivity between Rock Spring and the adjacent mall.

Image source: ULI Washington



The Klyde Warren Park in Dallas, TX, provides a great example of enhancing the pedestrian experience by breaking up auto-oriented superblocks. *Image source: <http://reconnectaustin.com/precedents/klyde-warren-park/>*

Another recommendation to break up the superblocks within the site is to add mid-block crossings that would, in effect, divide the large blocks into smaller components. For instance, the Klyde Warren Park in Dallas, Texas, a 5.2-acre deck park that was constructed in downtown Dallas over the recessed Woodall Rodgers Freeway, is a civic green space has become a central gathering point.⁵ This park also successfully eliminates the barrier of the highway by creating a seamless and pleasant overpass for people to connect between Pearl and St. Paul Streets in downtown Dallas.⁶

IDENTITY: LIVE WELL

Like Executive Boulevard, the lack of identity is a major challenge with the Rock Spring study area. The study area contains very little to differentiate it as a unique place. To address this challenge, Panelists considered the area's assets—it's campus-like environment, its ample open and green space, and its multitude of medical tenants—in identifying benefits that can differentiate it as a unique site within Montgomery County. The Panel recommended creating and branding an identity for the study area around the idea "Live Well."

Identifying and branding the Rock Spring area as a Live Well destination will require building upon the existing medical tenants and the park-like environment. This could include creating an anchor within the study area that would be designated for wellness and other central community uses, such as a large community center with athletic facilities or a medical clinic. In addition to reinforcing the theme of wellness, this lifestyle amenity would provide enjoyment for the existing office workers onsite, as well as attract tenants and residents

⁵ <http://www.klydewarrenpark.org/About-the-Park/index.html>

⁶ The Klyde Warren Park is also heavily programmed with such activities as with children's music and story time and food trucks. Learn more at <http://www.klydewarrenpark.org/>.

to the area. As part of the “Live Well” identity, the Panel also recommended enhancing the pedestrian environment by improving connections to the disparate green areas within Rock Spring, as well as between Rock Spring and the surrounding residential communities. Finally, improving the area’s entry points by creating a more formal gateway theme through artwork and signage will enhance the overall sense of identity and brand the study area.

AMENITIES

The Panel uniformly agreed that the Rock Spring area holds a lot of potential, but its lack of amenity base renders it unable to flourish. The Panel recommended infusing communal amenities into a central location on the site in order to enhance the area. Instead of individual property owners offering services such as basement gyms or internal coffee shops, the Panel suggested centralizing these uses in one area within the campus in order to create a big communal space for wellness.

Additionally, the Panel recommended creating a centrally located mixed use “village center” that would be walkable from all points within the campus. This center, which would include the “Live Well” community center discussed above, might also include retail, art facilities, and perhaps a library, which could be relocated from across the street. The Panel also recommended leveraging the existing ample green space by building a trail network and providing seating, which would make for an overall coherent open space system throughout the study area. This green space should also be better connected to the surrounding community, which would draw more people into the area and add opportunities for interaction.



The ample green space within the Rock Spring campus is a major amenity. Adding connections and seating to this green space will make it more accessible for users. *Photo source: TAP briefing materials*

LAND USE

Like the Executive Boulevard study area, the Rock Spring study area is in need of a mix of uses. The Panel acknowledged and supported the existing pipeline for redevelopment, including the DRI mixed-use site as well as the construction of the EYA residential development, and contended that these developments will catalyze further development. In order to expedite development in the area, the Panel recommended designating a staff position, or ombudsman, who would be specifically tasked with facilitating the land-use and approval processes. The Panel further recommended that the County be flexible in the uses for the site by eliminating zoning constraints. Panelists recommended that “the market should create the mix,” and stated that the market—not arbitrary zoning requirements—should be the determining factor of the mix of uses that arrive on the site.

Finally, the Panel recommended using the Rock Spring site as a place to explore a creative approach to address countywide issue of school crowding. Acknowledging the sensitivities and contentiousness involved in this recommendation, the Panel asserted that it is necessary to be creative to solve tough problems. The Panel discussed that school overcrowding tends not to be an issue of redevelopment, but is instead often a challenge associated with turnover in existing stable residential areas. Generally, in this region, multi-family development does not engender the same amount of school-aged children as do single-family communities.

The Panel suggested that the existing Walter Johnson school site, with its large footprint and existing athletic fields, could be a location where there is opportunity to co-locate an additional school that would share facilities. Alternatively, the Panel suggested that the redevelopment within Rock Spring could provide an opportunity to use an existing green space or parking surface for a new elementary school. Within this recommendation, the Panel underscored the value of considering urban standards for schools, which can provide guidance on streamlining uses to use space more efficiently.⁷

⁷ Another idea that seemed sensible to the Panel was to explore the option of repurposing an existing office for use as a school. This notion, however, was emphasized to be a “non-starter” to Panelists, and consequently, was not put forward a formal recommendation.



ROCK SPRING FRAMEWORK PLAN

This rendering shows a framework plan that incorporates the Panel's recommendations. Red stars symbolize key locations where community amenities could be enhanced. Blue shading in the southeast section of the map indicates the Walter Johnson athletic fields and parking lots, and is intended to show the ample space available to co-locate an additional school. *Image source: ULI Washington*

-  ENTRY EVENT
-  STRONG CONNECTION
-  NEW AMENITIES
-  EXISTING AMENITIES
-  PARK/TRAIL SYSTEM
-  NEW STREETS
-  URBAN SCHOOL

Implementation Strategies

In order to implement the recommendations outlined for both the Executive Boulevard and Rock Spring study areas, the Panel provided a series of strategies intended to stimulate change for both areas. Together, these strategies comprise a toolbox of options that can catalyze change.

LAND-USE POLICY

With regard to land use, the Panel strongly encouraged flexibility in zoning in order to encourage a diversity of uses. Providing flexibility paves a path to “The Better Idea”—something that may not be obvious during the initial planning phase, but may become apparent later on. Panelists cited the example of bringing the Fillmore concert venue to Silver Spring. Initially, this venue was not planned to be part of the Silver Spring renaissance, but was an endeavor highly supported by County Executive Isaiah Leggett later on in the planning process.⁸ Panelists suggested that a similar opportune “Big Idea” might present itself for either of the study areas in this TAP. Providing flexibility to capitalize on this idea is critical. Panelists also recommended that the County take action to accelerate the entitlement process.

FINANCIAL TOOLS

Several financial options exist that could spur development in the two TAP study areas. For instance, a tax abatement could be used to create a centralized wellness community center in the Rock Spring study area. Alternatively,

⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/fillmore-silver-spring-makes-splashy-entrance-on-dcs-concert-scene/2011/09/01/gIQA5DjLFK_story.html

creating a special assessment taxing district would be a great way to accelerate the desired infrastructure improvements within the Executive Boulevard study area. Panelists suggested that property owners may consider it worthwhile to contribute resources to accelerate infrastructure improvements—such as the realignment of Old Georgetown Road or the creation of an additional entrance to the Metrorail station—which would, in turn, bring more people into the area and benefit the developments.

Furthermore, acquisition by the County of a vacant or underperforming office building to spur a change in its use could be a tactic for the Rock Spring study area, particularly if this acquisition is coupled with a public private partnership to create a community use that does not currently exist—such as a center for wellness. Finally, the Panel suggested tax-increment financing (TIF) as an option for the County to consider.

PROGRAMMING

Increasingly, mixed-use and lifestyle developments incorporate an element of programming, which contributes to creating a sense of place. Farmers markets, craft festivals, wellness fairs, and food truck gatherings are all programmatic options that require relatively little resources, but can make a huge difference in creating a sense of identity. In particular, these programs bring new people into the areas, thereby encouraging interaction in what is otherwise a placeless place.

GARNERING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

In order to accomplish any of these recommendations, the Panel emphasized the importance of establishing the community's support. This critical element may not come easily—particularly for recommendations that are controversial. The Panel suggested that helping community members understand the fiscal burden of underperforming real estate—not only on the immediate vicinity, but also for the region as a whole—can encourage the general public to better understand some of the difficult decisions faced by the county. Providing education on the impact on schools from new multifamily development should be part of this overall effort.

Conclusion

The locational viability for both Executive Boulevard and Rock Spring is uncontested. At the same time, the challenges faced by both study areas are significant. Office space trends are changing nationally and regionally, and overcoming the challenges in both Executive Boulevard and Rock Spring will require attentiveness, flexibility, creativity, and dedication.

Over the course of the two-day TAP, the Panel discussed the connectivity, identity, amenity, and land-use opportunities and challenges of both the Executive Boulevard and the Rock Spring study areas, and made a host of recommendations in these four categories. The overall sense of the Panel was that the challenges facing these study areas are not insurmountable. In fact, finding creative solutions to address these challenges will likely result in creating new opportunities for both study areas, which would have positive ramifications for the County and for the region.

Panelists

Bob Eisenberg, CHAIR

Managing Director, Clark Enterprises
Bethesda, MD

Bob Eisenberg currently serves as Managing Director of Clark Enterprises, Inc. in this diversified investment company's real estate group. Prior to joining Clark, Bob founded Heritage Property Company in 2006. Heritage Property Company focused on commercial and multifamily residential development, redevelopment and repositioning and included an Advisory Services platform that offered property investors strategic property-level and portfolio-wide perspectives as well as transactional support.

Mr. Eisenberg possesses more than twenty-five years of extensive experience in Washington area real estate acquisition, development, financing, leasing, asset and property management and disposition. His career has centered on class-A, institutional grade assets with an emphasis on ground-up development, and he has been involved in more than \$1.5 billion of transactions and 3.5 million square feet of properties. During his career he has acquired or developed nearly 2 million square feet of office, multi-family and flex properties with an initial valuation of nearly \$500 million.

Mr. Eisenberg holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Maryland and is a licensed CPA in Maryland. He is an active member of the Urban Land Institute where he serves on the Washington District Council's Advisory Board and Management Committee and as co-chair of the ULI Washington TAP Committee. He resides in Bethesda, Maryland.

Robert Atkinson

Associate Principal and Vice President, Davis Carter Scott
Fairfax, VA

Robert Atkinson is an Associate Principal and Vice president at Davis Carter Scott, one of the leading architectural firms in the Washington Metropolitan Area. Prior to joining Davis Carter Scott, Mr. Atkinson spent 14 years with the Department of Economic Development in Arlington Virginia where he was responsible for the development of the award winning Rosslyn Station Area Plan Addendum, assisted numerous projects through the site plan approval process and was an active participant in developing many of the County's land use policies. Mr. Atkinson began his career as Urban Designer for the City of Little Rock, Arkansas where he was instrumental in developing the Downtown Plan as well as numerous neighborhood plans and other studies. Robert holds a Bachelor of University Studies degree from the University of New Mexico in architecture, planning and architectural history.

Dean D. Bellas, Ph.D.

President, Urban Analytics, Inc.
Alexandria, Virginia

Dr. Dean Bellas is president of Urban Analytics, Inc., a real estate and urban planning consulting firm providing urban development analytical services to public, private and institutional-sector clients. Consulting services include fiscal and economic impact studies, market research and economic base studies, analyses of real estate development economics, and project feasibility studies. Since 1996, Dr. Bellas has conducted consulting assignments in eleven states and the District of Columbia. Dr. Bellas has authored or co-authored over sixty research reports on the fiscal and economic impacts of real estate development.

In addition to Urban Analytics, Dr. Bellas is affiliated with The Catholic University of America where he holds the position of Lecturer in the School of Architecture and Planning. Previously, he has been a lecturer in the School of Professional Studies in Business and Education at the Johns Hopkins University, and in the School of Management at George Mason University. Dr. Bellas has also taught candidates for the CFA (certified financial analyst) designation on behalf of the Washington Society of Investment Analysts.

Dr. Bellas is a full member of the Urban Land Institute and has participated in a variety of ULI activities including five Advisory Services Panels. He sits on ULI's national Public Development and Infrastructure Council, regionally on the ULI Baltimore/Washington, DC Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Council, and locally on the ULI Washington District Regionalism Initiative Council.

He has served on the ULI Washington Technical Advisory Panel for Prince George's County, Maryland.

Dr. Bellas received a BS degree in business administration from Western New England University with a concentration in finance, a MURP degree in urban and regional planning from George Washington University, and a PhD degree in public policy with a concentration in regional economic development policy from George Mason University. Dr. Bellas is a member of the National Economists Club and Lambda Alpha International, an honorary society for the advancement of land economics.

Brigg Bunker

President, Development, Foulger Pratt Development
Rockville, MD

As President of Development for Foulger Pratt Development, Brigg Bunker is responsible for managing the Development Division, where his main role is to oversee daily operations and execute the firm's development plans. Previously, as Vice-President of Development, he was responsible for the underwriting, entitlement, financing, and execution of a diverse portfolio of development projects. Mr. Bunker joined Foulger-Pratt in 2009 following many years of success in private equity, multi-family development, and real estate acquisitions.

Mr. Bunker received a Bachelor of Science in Finance from Brigham Young University and an MBA from The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. Mr. Bunker is also on the NAIOP National Mixed-Use Council.

Barbara Byron

Director, Fairfax County Office of Community Revitalization
Fairfax, VA

Barbara Byron is a registered Landscape Architect with has a Master's Degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Virginia and is an AICP. Between 1986 and 2007, Ms. Byron was the Director of the Fairfax County, Virginia, Zoning Evaluation Division in the Department of Planning and Zoning. In that position, she was responsible for direction and oversight of the 400 to 500 rezoning, special exception, special permit, and variance applications that are presented to and decided by the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals each year.

In 2007, Ms. Byron assumed responsibility for a new office that was created in Fairfax County—the Office of Community Revitalization. In that capacity, she

heads an office charged with the revitalization of the County's older commercial and mixed use areas, including leading the County's efforts to redevelop Tysons from an auto-oriented edge city into a pedestrian oriented urban environment. In addition, she has a primary role in the County's public/private partnerships including the formulation of Community Development Authorities and Tax Increment Financing initiatives, including leading the County's efforts on the Mosaic at Merrifield development.

Prior to her experience in Fairfax County, Ms. Byron was an associate at EDAW, Inc., an international landscape architecture and planning firm.

Matt Klein

President and CEO, Akridge
Washington, DC

Matt Klein is President and CEO of Akridge. Mr. Klein has 30 years of hands-on real estate experience and has been President of Akridge since 2001. Headquartered in Washington, DC since 1974, Akridge has developed, acquired, and/or entitled more than 14 million square feet of project in the Washington metropolitan area and currently has over \$2 billion in real estate assets under management (including third party management) and 120 employees.

Mr. Klein is responsible for the strategic and operational direction for all aspects of the company's business, including property operations, strategic planning, corporate governance, acquisitions, development, finance, and partner relations. Under his leadership, Akridge has been recognized locally and nationally for its customer service, innovation, investment results, and community involvement. The company has received a long inventory of awards and recognition including the National Capital Area Business Ethics Award; numerous Firm of the Year Awards and has been featured in Washingtonian magazine and Washington Business Journal's Best Places to Work.

Mr. Klein is the immediate past Chairman of the ULI Washington District Council; a past Chair of the Washington DC Chamber of Commerce; past Chairman of the Board for the Downtown Business Improvement District; on the Executive Committee of the District of Columbia Building Industry Association; a member of The Greater Washington Board of Trade, the World Presidents' Organization, and the Federal City Council; and, has also served on the Mayor's Green Ribbon Committee and Streetcar Advisory Task Force. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from Wake Forest University.

Alex Rixey

Senior Transportation Planner, Fehr & Peers DC
Washington, D.C.

Alex Rixey, AICP, is a Senior Transportation Planner with Fehr & Peers DC. He has diverse, multimodal transportation and land use project experience at a variety of geographic scales, ranging from single development sites to citywide master plans.

Mr. Rixey has served as project manager or technical lead for projects serving public- and private-sector client needs, including travel demand modeling; transportation and parking studies; master plan, transit neighborhood plan, and mobility element development; and data analysis and visualization, with an emphasis on analyzing the effects of built environment and demographic characteristics on demand for all modes of travel. He has led numerous bikesharing studies, including the Los Angeles County Regional Bikeshare Implementation Plan, and developed a statistical model to forecast bike sharing ridership at the station level; his research is published by the Transportation Research Board. Mr. Rixey also helped the City of Pasadena develop and adopt multimodal transportation performance measures that incorporate land use, transportation, and accessibility factors for auto, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian modes as alternatives to the traditional, auto-oriented Level of Service metric. Mr. Rixey is currently leading Fehr & Peers' evaluation of Montgomery County's transportation analysis tools for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission and managing the firm's development of a bicycle parking demand model for the San Diego County Association of Governments.

Mr. Rixey graduated from the University of Virginia with a BS in Systems Engineering and Economics and from the University of California, Los Angeles with a Master's Degree in Urban Planning, concentrating in Transportation. He serves as Secretary of the Institute of Transportation Engineers' Complete Streets Council and as Vice Chair of the Pedestrian and Bicycle Standing Committee. An avid cyclist, Mr. Rixey is training for his fourth AIDS/Lifecycle fundraiser ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles. He lives in the Shaw neighborhood of Washington, D.C.

Rebecca Snyder

Partner, Insight Property Group, LLC
Arlington, VA

As a Partner at Insight Property Group, Rebecca Snyder is responsible for all facets of multifamily development and investment. Prior to joining Insight, Ms. Snyder was at Archstone where she was responsible for all aspects of multifamily development from site selection through stabilization. During her 7

years at Archstone, Ms. Snyder participated in the development of over 1,600 luxury apartments in the DC region and provided investment analysis for the company's \$4 billion national development pipeline. She played a key role in the development of some of the company's most notable projects in the DC region including Archstone Wisconsin Place, CityCenterDC and Archstone First + M.

Prior to Archstone, Ms. Snyder oversaw the sales and marketing of more than 350 luxury condominium units in the District of Columbia and Northern Virginia for McWilliams Ballard. Ms. Snyder received a Master of Urban and Environmental Planning and a Certificate in Historic Preservation from the University of Virginia, and an A.B. in Urban Studies from Brown University.

Stan Wall

Partner, HR&A Advisors
Washington, DC

Stan Wall is senior real estate executive with 20 years of experience across the entire real estate project lifecycle including strategy, planning, finance, development, and construction. Mr. Wall is a Partner with HR&A Advisors, Inc.—an economic development strategy, real estate development advisory, and program design and implementation firm. At HR&A, Mr. Wall leads the firm's Washington, DC office working with public and private sector clients in the region, including the National Capitol Planning Commission, the City of Alexandria, the U.S. Department of Housing and Community Development, and others.

Before joining HR&A, Stan was Director of Real Estate and Station Planning at the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. In this role, he led the agency's transit oriented development (TOD) program. With over 117 miles of rail, 91 stations, and over 1.2 million daily rail and bus trips, Metro is the second busiest transit system in the U.S. The agency also has one of the most active and successful joint development programs.

Mr. Wall is also owner of Wall Development Group, a Washington, DC based development firm focused on sustainable development, urban infill, and community-oriented projects. With Wall Development, Mr. Wall is completing development a mixed-use, retail/residential building in the emerging H Street NE corridor in Washington. Among the highlights of the project, it is designed to achieve LEED Platinum Certification upon completion, 25% of units will be set aside as affordable housing units.

Mr. Wall previously worked with Arup—an international firm of designers, planners, engineers, consultants and technical specialists with a focus on innovative projects.

Mr. Wall also worked for a number of years at Jones Lang LaSalle as a vice president in the firm's public institutions practice. Prior to Jones Lang LaSalle, Mr. Wall was a Manager with Deloitte Consulting, where he provided strategic advisory services to Fortune 500 companies in the areas of real estate, construction, and capital program management.

Mr. Wall received a Bachelor of Architectural Engineering (Construction Management emphasis) from Pennsylvania State University and a Master of Business Administration in finance and real estate from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a registered Professional Engineer in the District of Columbia and he has certification as a LEED Green Associate from the US Green Building Council. He is a member of the Urban Land Institute and serves on the Responsible Property Investment Council and he previously served as a commissioner for the Maryland Sustainable Growth Commission. In 2013, Mr. Wall was recognized by the Washington Business Journal as one of the region's Minority Business Leader Awa



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