



## Coalition for Smarter Growth

Choices for our communities, Choices for our region

Testimony before the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, regarding:

### Large Retail Sales Establishments Zoning Ordinance Amendments

Support recommendation to provide special exception approval by the Board for large retail establishments at or greater than 80,000 square feet, as outlined in the staff report

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Good afternoon, Chairman Connolly and members of the Board, and thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Melissa Bondi, and I serve as the Housing Director for the Coalition for Smarter Growth. The Coalition works in Fairfax and neighboring Washington DC jurisdictions to ensure that transportation and development decisions are made with broad public participation, and for the benefit of our entire community.

The Coalition supports the staff and Planning Commission recommendations to amend the zoning ordinance as outlined in the report. Bringing retail store proposals greater than 80,000 square feet under County special exception helps ensure these projects reflect comprehensive planning, transportation and environmental measures, thus better contributing to the public health and welfare. This allows large retailers to better contribute to the community they serve in partnership, while enhancing the economic viability of the stores themselves.

Better planning for these projects starts with good site design. Large, stand-alone retailers generally set their one-story buildings at the 'back' of a parcel. County review of these sites should be used to achieve planning best practices, such as adopting build-to lines and set back standards, moving the buildings adjacent the main roads they front. Buildings, rather than parking facilities, should frame the streets, creating a safer, more visible and attractive environment for shoppers, pedestrians and vehicles traversing the street where stores are located.

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Another important provision of the ordinance amendment emphasizes pedestrian visibility, circulation, and safety. As with all other Fairfax development proposals, large scale retailers should integrate highly visible, prioritized pedestrian amenities, such as well-lit, straight-line sidewalks and crosswalks from multiple major roads and adjacent parcels. In addition, adequate bicycle racks should be provided on-site for customers. These simple, low-cost transportation design elements are critical to allowing more Fairfax customers to use the stores without adding vehicular traffic, which both decreases polluting tailpipe emissions and reduces parking demand.

In addition, wherever possible, large scale retail stores should be located near bus and transit routes, further reducing air pollution, the impact on local streets and the need for parking. Additional stops and shelters may be warranted to meet demand on large retail sites. This multi-modal strategy would further allow more local customers access to goods and services provided on-site.

The Coalition also strongly supports integrating structured parking as part of the site design. Large retail stores commonly use significant land area to provide the maximum number of parking spaces, which at best will only be used on a handful of days each year. Overflow parking plan strategies should be encouraged; these management plans significantly reduce the amount of parking needed, and provide reassurance that reduced supply will not create problems. As well, smaller-footprint structured garages located at the back of stores can accommodate a significant number of vehicles while also reducing the amount of impermeable surface area commonly found with traditional surface parking lots.

Surface lots contribute to flash flooding runoff and create heat islands, which further and unnecessarily degrade our environment. Structured parking lots and the retail buildings themselves can be further enhanced with conservation-minded amenities like green roofs and cisterns. Examples of design choices like these will allow sites to contribute positively to regional environmental initiatives such as the Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts and air quality measures, and further supports the Board's important Cool Counties campaign.

Looking ahead, the special exception process should be used to explore the potential of these large sites to achieve multi-purpose uses for the Fairfax community. With just one additional floor of residential, office or retail uses, the same area can double its productivity – providing opportunities for community

centers and local facilities, affordable housing for workers, nonprofit office space or other retailers. This model is being embraced in large retail developments across the country as a best practice for their businesses and their communities; two good local models of mixed use development include a 2-story mixed-use Target store in Gaithersburg and a Whole Foods incorporating residential floors and other retailers in Alexandria. Mixed-use projects should be encouraged wherever they may be appropriately located to address a wider variety of community needs and amenities.

By employing sound planning and transportation principles in the special exception process, these large retail sites can more appropriately address Fairfax planning, transportation and environmental best practices and integrate into adjacent local communities, thus enhancing the public health and welfare and marketplace productivity. For these and other reasons outlined in the staff report, the Coalition for Smarter Growth recommends that the Board vote today to adopt the ordinance recommendations.

Thank you.