Dear Chairman Murphy, Commissioner Hart, Commissioner Carter,

I am writing to urge you to vote to defer the Campus Commons proposal when it comes before you on Thursday, 10 October. While this project has improved, it still contains significant flaws that are directly material to its readiness for consideration, especially since the developer is requesting final approval at this time and is slated to go before the Board of Supervisors less than one week later for a vote.

TF Cornerstone’s team has made commendable changes in response to community input, notably on Sunrise Valley and Wiehle setbacks and streetscapes, additional tree plantings, reduced massing of the corner commercial building, and somewhat more robust wording of a proffer on an above-grade Wiehle crossing. Having participated in every community meeting held thus far, I appreciate their decision to heed the voices of residents.

Nevertheless, I remain deeply concerned over how pedestrians will safely cross Wiehle to reach the Metro station, the impact of the 6,000-plus new vehicular trips per day that this project will generate, and the height and scale of the 26-story residential tower proposed for the northeast corner of the site. A vote to defer will allow time for key stakeholders to identify solutions to these issues before the project goes before the Board of Supervisors.

Pedestrian safety and the at-grade crosswalk: Pedestrian safety at the proposed at-grade crosswalk at Wiehle and the Toll Road is a critical concern raised repeatedly by the Planning Commission itself, the Reston Planning & Zoning Committee (Reston P&Z), and the Reston community. At the Commission’s 25 September public hearing, Commissioners Carter and Cortina both flagged it, stressing that the crosswalk lands pedestrians on a concrete “refuge” in the Toll Road’s eastbound exit ramp. Indeed, the Campus Commons project twice failed to win approval by the Reston P&Z, due directly to the Committee’s worries over pedestrian safety at this very busy intersection. And safety has been a major factor in community opposition, particularly from residents who use Metro and personally know the risks of crossing Wiehle during peak morning and afternoon periods.

Indeed, it was because of pedestrian safety that Fairfax County DOT and VDOT have from the outset repeatedly identified a grade-separated pedestrian connection between Campus Commons and the Wiehle Metro station as a “critical need,” requesting that a “pedestrian underpass or overpass be provided as such a facility would better accommodate the anticipated demand for this crossing” [my emphasis]. However, as FCDOT’s report notes,
TF Cornerstone “refused to entertain this option, instead preferring to further study an at-grade crosswalk.” (See Fairfax County staff report, PDF pp. 236-240.)

Of the five crosswalk designs submitted by the developer, FCDOT and VDOT found only one to be “potentially feasible,” with FCDOT noting its unease over the 11 lanes of traffic and two bike lanes that pedestrians would have to cross. FCDOT further wrote that it “remains concerned about pedestrian site access and connectivity to Metrorail” and “recommends that the applicant provide a grade-separated crossing between the site and the Metrorail Station to accommodate its future residents, workers, and visitors.”

For its part, VDOT pointed to additional issues in its 23 July 2019 report to County staff:

“A grade separated pedestrian crossing should be considered. Pedestrian access will not be allowed across the Limited Access Line at the Toll Road Ramps. The Limited Access Line has been shown along Wiehle Avenue and the pedestrian facilities need to respect this line and not cross it. No site disturbance should extend into the Toll Road right of way. No breaks in the limited access will be permitted. There appears to be some construction indicated on this property, which will not be permitted.”

The graphic below shows this intersection, along with the VDOT Limited Access Lines:

I can appreciate the applicant’s desire to push this proposal forward after two years of work. However, the fact remains that it was TF Cornerstone that refused for two years to consider a grade-separated crossing, TF Cornerstone that insisted on pursuing an at-grade
crosswalk, TF Cornerstone that chose not to provide FCDOT and VDOT with grade-separated designs, and TF Cornerstone that apparently did not even develop such designs until pressed by the community to do so.

This lapse is important because the 2016 Gartner Group study on Fairfax County land use and development explicitly stresses that developers be encouraged to “improve timeliness and quality of submissions (slide 38), that they be "fully aware of all processes and requirements" (slide 39), and that they "commit to making a best effort to provide high-quality submissions to the land use and development processes" (slide 41).

To approve the Campus Commons proposal now would undercut the Gartner Group provisions and reward this developer for having “refused” (in FCDOT’s words) to cooperate. While TF Cornerstone recently tabled three designs for a grade-separated crossing, it has yet to submit them to FCDOT and VDOT, instead offering to create a study group to select a preferred option, leaving the final resolution unclear.

On this issue alone, the Campus Commons project merits a vote to defer until TF Cornerstone has provided its grade-separated crossing designs for official review and comment to the relevant state and local transportation agencies. Only when we have all gotten clarity on exactly how pedestrians can safely cross Wiehle to access the Metro should this project be approved by the Commission and set in motion.

**Traffic congestion and demand management**: I join Commissioner Ulfelder in his concern over the amount of new traffic generated by Campus Commons, a concern he raised twice at the 25 September public hearing. Since then, TF Cornerstone has lowered its estimated daily vehicular totals from just over 6,600 to roughly 6,100 by reducing the proposed commercial building’s size. It is important to keep in mind, though, that this 6,100 is not included in the estimated 33,500 new vehicles added every day by the six other developments recently built or approved in the Sunset Hills-Wiehle-Sunrise Valley area, according to the April 2019 developer’s traffic impact analysis (TIA).

My concern is over traffic flows along Sunrise Valley and Wiehle after build-out. This complex corner is in a very short space on both Sunrise Valley (from Campus Commons to Wiehle) and again on Wiehle (from Sunrise Valley to the Toll Road). On each stretch, there is only enough space for 22 vehicles at most. Traffic flow is now aided by two continuous right turn lanes, but this will end after the installation of new crosswalks and removal of pedestrian “pork chops,” a change that will understandably require a much longer traffic signal and no more continuous right turn options, both of which will lengthen back-ups.

To help us all better visualize future traffic patterns, I respectfully request that you ask TF Cornerstone to provide an animated graphic that displays current traffic flows at peak hours, along with a similar animation of how traffic will flow after build-out during those same time periods. This should not be difficult as I assume they have already completed such a computer-generated animation to revalidate their calculations on traffic congestion and flows at all these intersections to make sure their projections work as intended.
Indeed, such an animation could help clarify why the most recent TIA update projects a
further deterioration of the Level of Service at Sunrise Valley and Campus Commons/Upper
Lake West (from C to D) and at Wiehle and the Dulles Toll eastbound ramps (from B to C).
Indeed, of the 8 intersections studied, fully half will continue to come in at level D or worse.
(See 3 October Trip Generation Comparison Summary, page 9.)

This question of estimated traffic levels is especially critical, given that the developer is
projecting an optimistic 45% reduction in vehicle trips generated by Campus Commons.
Unfortunately, Fairfax County has little in the way of hard data on how well this or other
developers are meeting their traffic reduction goals since the County has yet to conduct an
independent study of its own. At the moment, it is developers themselves who are solely
responsible for monitoring their own projects for adherence to estimated traffic reductions
and self-reporting any failures to do so. Few seem to fail, from the data I’ve seen.

I raise this because Arlington County has now done four independent traffic studies that
appear to call into question TF Cornerstone’s projection of a 45% reduction. While this
developer will indeed pay a modest $147,000 fine if it fails to achieve that 45% goal, every
commuter travelling in and through Reston will bear the brunt if they do not.

I know your hands are largely tied, as it is County policy to allow developers to escape any
failure to achieve traffic reduction goals with minimal financial pain. However, I would ask
that the developer be asked to provide a more complete traffic impact study, one that
includes what the Level of Service will be if they merely achieve a 30-35% traffic reduction,
which is more in line with Arlington’s overall findings. This would give all of us a more
realistic picture of what we are facing in the future, once this project is completed.

**Size and scale of residential tower:** The height of the residential tower remains a
concern, given its proximity to the single-family homes and two-story townhouses across
Sunrise Valley. The Reston portion of the Fairfax Comprehensive Plan is clear: TSA
developments shall “maintain the character and livability of residential neighborhoods
adjacent to the TSA” (p. 112), ensure the “tallest buildings and highest land use intensity
[are] closest to the Metro” (p 126), ensure that “appropriate transitions will be provided
between new development and all residential neighborhoods” (p. 11), and, for Sunrise
Valley Drive specifically, “integrate new development with existing development” (p 114).

Given that this building will reach 320 feet, it is hard to understand how it “integrate[s]
with existing development” when it will be 15 times the height of the average home across
Sunrise Valley Drive and end up as one of the tallest structures in all of Reston. The
developer repeatedly stresses that their building heights are consistent with other Wiehle
TSA areas, but the other TSA areas are not their only neighbors. I would ask that the
developer be tasked with providing an artist’s rendition of how this building compares to
our neighborhood and how it will appear from the Upper Lake/Geddys Court corner. If we
are to be neighbors, then we would like to know what we will be seeing from now on.

Two unintended consequences of such a tall structure also need to be addressed. Residents
at the 5 September community meeting raised concerns about visual privacy and
specifically requested an artist’s rendering of what occupants of the higher levels of the tower will see from their windows; no such rendering has thus far been offered. In addition, TF Cornerstone’s designs depict a glass-covered exterior on all sides. Given that our neighborhoods are on the south side of this development, sunlight will be reflecting down onto our homes every morning and evening all year long and all day long in the winter, given the lower angle of the sun. With both these issues in mind, I would ask that the developer be requested to examine how the tallest portion of this tower can be reduced and to commit to an exterior covering that will not direct unwanted glare onto our homes.

Mr. Chairman, my goal is not to prevent this proposed project from being completed. Further development of the areas around our Metro stations has long been in the cards and, when done well, adds benefit to surrounding communities such as ours. But I fear that this project may be rushed forward before these key uncertainties can be resolved in a way that will make it the best it can be and can be embraced by all Reston residents.

For the past five weeks, TF Cornerstone has greatly improved its community outreach, and many positive changes have happened as a result. However, concerns about the pedestrian crossing over Wiehle Avenue to the Metro, about the traffic intensity and congestion that this project will produce, and about the unintended consequences of an overly high tower next to residential neighborhoods remain unanswered.

Mr. Chairman, those of us who call Reston home don’t think of it as Transit Station Area Reston or Planned Residential Community Reston. It’s all One Reston to us, the place where we live and work, send our kids to school, play golf with friends, enjoy the lakes and pools, and otherwise go about our daily lives in a town we love. And we welcome all who embrace the Reston vision of a balanced, planned community. That’s why this project is so important — because all these new developments, including Campus Commons, become part of One Reston, even though that can easily be overlooked during the planning phase.

Please help us work with TF Cornerstone to help them better integrate into that One Reston vision by voting to defer this proposal.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Donna Gough  
Winterport Cluster, Reston, VA

CC:  
Commissioner James Migliaccio (Lee)  
Commissioner Timothy Sargeant (At-Large)  
Commissioner Ellen Hurley (Braddock)  
Commissioner John Ulfelder (Dranesville)  
Commissioner Julie Strandlie (Mason)
Commissioner Walter Clarke (Mount Vernon)
Commissioner Philip Niedzielski-Eichner (Providence)
Commissioner Donté Tanner (Sully)
Commissioner Mary Cortina (At-Large)

Sharon Bulova, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman
Penelope Gross, Vice-Chair and Mason District Supervisor
Catherine Hudgins, Hunter Mill Supervisor
John Cook, Braddock District Supervisor
John Foust, Dranesville District Supervisor
Jeffrey McKay, Lee District Supervisor
Daniel Storck, Mount Vernon District Supervisor
Linda Smyth, Providence District Supervisor
Pat Herrity, Springfield District Supervisor
Kathy Smith, Sully District Supervisor

Dennis Hays, President, Reston Citizens Association
Connie Hartke, President, Rescue Reston
Lorri Zell, Co-chair, Rescue Sunrise Valley/Save Our Sunrise (SOS)
Michelle Kimmel, Co-chair, Rescue Sunrise Valley/Save Our Sunrise (SOS)
Jennifer Jushchuk, Co-chair, Rescue Sunrise Valley/Save Our Sunrise (SOS)
Sheila Dunheimer, Hunter Mill Association
Jehanne Arslan, Hunter Mill Association
Jody Bennett, Hunter Mill Defense League
Walter Alcorn