Comments Regarding Commercial Zones along Maple Avenue: Items to Consider in Community Survey
Douglas E. Noble

Per Town Manager and DPZ Director Goal for October 22nd Meeting: Staff is looking for guidance on what matters Town Council would like to receive feedback on from residents, business owners, and property owners, which will be the basis of the community survey.

General Comments on Process

Direction
The directive to Town staff from the vote of the Council was as follows, "*It was moved to direct town staff to draft amendments to the MAC as its top priority and simultaneously to consider amendments to the regular commercial code C.1, C.1A , C.1B, and C.2 in Chapter 18 of the Town Code that affect the MAC. It was further moved to direct staff to draft amendments to the regular commercial code that require the MAC street scape, require landscaping for parking lots and direct staff to consider changes to parking requirements or other incentives to encourage economic growth on Maple Avenue when drafting these amendments.*"

The specifics in this direction were to:
- Draft amendments to MAC zoning overlay
- Draft amendments to C-1, C-1A, C-1B and C-2 that affect MAC zoning overlay
- Consider amendment to regular commercial code (to:
    - apply MAC Streetscape (which does lead to the question whether this is intended to apply fully to Church Street (C-1B) as well the way it is worded)
    - require landscaping in parking lots
    - consider changes to parking requirements to encourage economic growth
    - consider other incentives to encourage economic growth

N.B. I agree that the references and overall code structure needs to be fixed for compliance with state code and clarity (CM Potter noted as well in the work session). That is why I was such a strong advocate for the comprehensive update to the entire zoning and subdivision code to bring in outside professional expertise… that approach was declined by the majority of the Council. I still believe that approach has merit.

Sources of information
- Proposed options for revised MAC overlay to Zoning Map (plus existing boundary and with additional option from Council per 10-9-19 meeting)
- Redline version of Town Code sections with annotated comments from staff, Council, Planning Commission, and Ad Hoc Committee on MAC zoning:
- Article 13.1 - MAC - Maple Avenue Commercial - Code Edits - Redline Version 10-9-19
- Article 11 - C-1 Local Commercial - Code Edits - Redline Version 10-9-19 TC WS
- Article 12 - C-1A Special Commercial - Code Edits - Redline Version 10-9-19 TC WS
- Article 12.1 - C-1B Pedestrian Commercial - Code Edits - Redline Version 10-9-19 TC WS
- Article 13 - C-2 General Commercial - Code Edits - Redline Version 10-9-19 TC WS
- Article 16 - Off-street Parking and Loading Areas - Code Edits - Redline Version 10-9-19 TC WS
- Article 18 - Supplemental Regulations - Code Edits - Redline Version 9-9-19 TC WS

- Article 25 - Site Plan Control Provisions - Code Edits - Redline Version 10-9-19 TC WS
- Redline version of MAC Design Guidelines
- MAC Design Guidelines Survey

Concepts:
To borrow from Stephen Covey, "We need to begin with the end in mind…"

As I have stated many times before in my mind's eye I see a place like one of the many commuter railroad suburbs outside major cities like Chicago or Philadelphia…or a Mid-Atlantic / Midwestern county seat of a 10,000-25,000 population.

We need to mindful that the Town Council is a policy setting body. The Council shouldn't be in the business of writing zoning code that is best work for professional planners and land use attorneys to do. Rather, the Council should be identifying the outcomes that a revised Town Code would enable.

At this point the Council is too bogged down in specific details of numbers, values and subsections of code without understanding what our community's stakeholders really desire. That should be tested from a high level to progressively more refined level of detail… I also believe that our community stakeholders have different levels of understanding or interest in any number of these topics… such as the difference between the implications of 3 stories/35 ft vs. 3 stories/41 ft mean in what the Town will look like in the future, or what a code definition gathering space vs. open space means.

So, who are the Town's stakeholder's (my list…there are probably other groups too):
- Residential property owners
- Commercial property owners
- Residents
- Businesses
- Visitors
- Potential/Future residents, business, developers
- Town staff
- Town elected and appointed decision-makers
- Interested state/local agencies and elected officials

What Matters?
We need to ask basic questions first and build policy around the answers, then code to support those policies (some of these have information from the Design Guidelines workshops and drafting process):
- What is downtown Vienna?
  -Is it Church Street?
  -Is it Maple Avenue? All of it? Part of it?
  In my mind it the properties with facades facing Maple and Church with the cross streets from Lawyers to Park Street
- What is commercial Vienna?
  -The rest of Maple Avenue? Cedar Lane Shopping Center?
  -Industrial zoning of Mill and Dominion? Navy Federal Credit Union area
- Related to that question… (This is about the spaces that business might occupy)
  -What would make downtown Vienna distinctive to differentiate it from other places in Northern Virginia like Falls Church, Mosaic, McLean, Oakton, or Fairfax City?

-How do we differentiate Vienna as a discretionary place for people from "Tysons City" to visit. We need to recognize the role the Tysons Master Plan will have in the economy of the area and those effects on Vienna.

- What makes each of these areas distinct from each other…from other places?
    o Comfortable pedestrian-oriented streetscape?
    o Number of stories, building height? (distinction between tall 3 story building and re
    o Setbacks?
    o Parking where (in front, in back, garage, underground)? How much? On-site or option to "buy-in" public spaces?
- What is the desire/need for diverse housing options?
    -Less expensive housing?
    -Formal affordable housing program?
    -Is housing in downtown Vienna or commercial Vienna appropriate and to what extent?
    I believe it is, certainly in downtown Vienna
- How should commercial areas transition to residential?
    o By land use
        -Mixed use in commercial areas?
        -Village housing?
        -Townhouses?
        Apartments?
    o By building dimension
        -Height, setbacks, open space, landscaping etc.
- What is driving the physical perception of "small town" or "home town" ? Is it architectural form in terms of the physical volume and mass of buildings (i.e. not Arlington)? Is it architectural style of older periods (1910s) vs. newer construction (2000s)?
- Trade-offs for walkability and others elements of a downtown vs. strip suburban commercial development require a density of activity. Are we comfortable with that? How much? Do we want our town's development to force people to drive everywhere or do we endorse a park-once concept.
- What are the trade-offs with private property owners to create an incentive for those elements the community wants versus what a property owner may want? What are the baseline requirements? This gets to what is in the regular commercial code vs. the MAC zoning overlay vs. a special exception process.

The Survey
Survey of residents and property owners. Self response is not enough. It does not provide a full view of the opinions of the entire Town…just those most active. Putting the survey link in the newsletter won't likely be enough to achieve this either. The responses need to represent statistically valid set of disaggregated demographic groups. The questions need to be validated and have internal testing of criteria…especially if we are using visual images.

Closing
I believe there is a lot work to do and I would like see how we can achieve consensus on the issues were we agree. However, many of these issues cannot be reduced to a visual image supported survey and need to be part of a set of workshops and conversation with all the various community stakeholders