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Brittany M. Roethemeier, J.D.

May 20, 2021

Dear Chairman Forester and Planning Commission Members,

Please accept this letter on behalf of the Fayette Alliance with respect to the proposal of Imagine Nicholasville Road for adoption and incorporation into the 2018 Comprehensive Plan, Imagine Lexington.¹

Founded in 2006, Fayette Alliance is a non-profit dedicated to achieving sustainable, equitable growth in Lexington-Fayette County through land use advocacy, education, and research. We believe that preserving our unique and productive Bluegrass farmland, advancing smart growth, innovative development and improving our infrastructure are all essential to Lexington's continued success.

In furtherance of this mission, we respectfully submit the following with regard to our support for the adoption of Imagine Nicholasville Road.

As Lexington-Fayette County continues to evolve, we know the question is now if we grow, but how. Investment in transportation and mobility infrastructure plays a critical role in Lexington's success. The means by which we get from A to B is essential to the overall quality of life of our neighbors and the sustained economic prosperity of our City.² Innovative updates to guide development on our busiest corridor, Nicholasville Road, are key for future growth and success, and also provide the tools to overcome some of our greatest challenges, including affordability, equity, and access in housing, transportation, and infrastructure.

During the creation of Imagine Lexington, over 10,000 community members made their voices heard about

¹ Hereinafter referred to as the "Plan".

² The 2019 Deloitte City Mobility Index, "Gauging Global Readiness for the Future of Mobility," Id. pg. 2.



what they hoped to see reflected in our City's growth strategy over the next 20 years. One key recommendation was to develop in-depth land-use plans and transportation studies for Lexington's major corridors, with Nicholasville Road being the first to undergo this analysis. The community's policies and goals as outlined in the Plan included identifying opportunities for high-density development along corridors to accommodate future growth, supporting transit-oriented development, more efficiently managing traffic, and creating a more transit, pedestrian and bike-friendly environment.³ With Imagine Nicholasville Road, we see community members' desires, Planning Staff's thoughtful analysis, and hard data combined to support an innovative future vision.

Accommodating Growth

The recommendations brought forward in the Imagine Nicholasville Road plan further our goal of efficiently and effectively using our existing land and infrastructure to accommodate growth and to re-focus infill and redevelopment around people instead of around cars. In preparation for the 2018 Comprehensive Plan update, Fayette Alliance commissioned nationally-recognized firm Lord Aeck Sargent to analyze properties within the Urban Services Boundary and identify underutilized properties that offered future development and redevelopment opportunities. This landmark study identified over 9,000 non-residentially zoned acres of opportunities, primarily along our major corridors.⁴ The Planning Staff, in similar analyses, found that our major corridors are "vastly underutilized".⁵

Fayette Alliance also partnered with LBAR, HBAL, Fayette County PVA, and others on the 2017 Housing Demand Study, which showed the need to diversify our housing stock to meet the housing needs of our growing and changing population, including "missing middle" housing like duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes and other types of multi-family housing.⁶ Pursuant to the collection of population/demographic data, analysis of our existing land to accommodate growth, and the comprehensive public engagement process, the Plan recommended focusing growth on our major corridors, like Nicholasville Road, and implementing walkable, transit-friendly development. Because higher density development is not appropriate in every context, the Plan encouraged more dense

³ Id. Imagine Lexington, Theme A, www.imaginelexington.com.

⁴ The study also found an additional 5,616 acres of vacant land and 2,326 acres of undeveloped land. Underutilized Property Survey as of March 2017, Lord Aeck Sargent.

⁵ "Commerce Land & Patient Capital" presentation by LFUCG Planning Staff to the Planning Commission, May 10, 2017. Available at www.lexingtonky.gov/imaginelxington.com.

⁶ Fayette County Housing Demand Study, May 16, 2017.

development along our corridors to support enhanced transportation opportunities and to emphasize that this type of development wouldn't be appropriate in existing and established neighborhoods.⁷

Imagine Nicholasville Road identifies three initial sites along Nicholasville Road that are prime opportunities for re-development to achieve multiple goals discussed above: better use of vacant and underutilized land, encouraging new housing types to diversify our housing stock and work towards greater affordability, promoting higher density near existing transit and other services, and enhancing opportunities for transit, walkability, and connectivity of development. The catalyst sites identified by the plan showcase opportunities to accommodate growth in a way which meets the vision our community members set forth in the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. They outline opportunities for us to make our underutilized commercial land work for us as community members, creating more housing options and amenities closer to where we work and play.

Improving Quality of Life

As we increase density on our corridors and invest in more advanced transportation options to accommodate that growth, strategies to increase diversity of transit options, safety, and reduce congestion are critical. Imagine Nicholasville Road's proposals to implement Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Complete Streets, focusing on safety and accessibility for any mode of travel, can improve quality of life, accessibility and affordability for all community members and visitors traveling this busy corridor.

These strategies can help make modes of transportation other than personal cars feasible in Lexington. Transportation costs are the second largest expense for families after housing; the average US family can spend up to 20% of its income on transit expenses, and the average burden can be up to 30% for low income families.⁸ Increased transportation options means greater access and affordability for all.

Over 5,000 community members engaged with the Imagine Nicholasville Road public input process, prioritizing reduced congestion, walkable

⁷ Id. Imagine Lexington, Theme A, Density Policy 1.

⁸ "America's Transportation Energy Burden for Low-Income Families," American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, <https://www.aceee.org/blog/2016/07/america-s-transportation-energy>.

development, improved safety, and corridor beautification.⁹ This plan takes those priorities and provides a roadmap for putting into action changes that will directly and significantly impact the quality of life of anyone traveling this major corridor.

After decades of car-centric development in Lexington, Imagine Nicholasville Road lays out a framework for making development about people and how we use our land, while considering the realities of vehicle dependency intrinsic to our culture. It will take work to change the culture of transportation, and this is a strong foundation on which to build the changes necessary to better serve our community for present and future generations.

Encouraging Economic Growth and Prosperity

The Nicholasville Road corridor serves as the backbone of economic development in Lexington and is where the majority of our jobs are located. In analyzing the corridor's "area of influence", Planning Staff found it to include over 100,000 employees, 30,000 residents, and over 3600 businesses.¹⁰

Research shows that providing innovative solutions to public transit challenges and investment in public transportation infrastructure can significantly contribute to an entire region's competitiveness for good jobs and an educated workforce, even when those solutions aren't required to access those specific jobs.¹¹ Reducing travel time, travel costs, and transit reliability issues connected with car-dependence can provide significant savings to households and businesses, which correlate to an increase in jobs, income, and businesses sales, potentially contributing millions of dollars to a community's economy.¹²

Improving the entire transportation network of our busiest corridor, and the in-depth analysis of each segment and related area of Nicholasville Road to establish the real needs of the same, provides a creative and forward-thinking framework for better serving our community members and businesses, encouraging continued economic growth and success for Lexington.

⁹ Imagine Nicholasville Road Report & Recommendations, Id. at pg. 21, <http://imaginenicholasvilleroad.com/>.

¹⁰ Id. at pg. 13.

¹¹ "Public Transportation's Role in the Knowledge Economy," American Public Transportation Association, February 2016, Id. <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/Resources/resources/reportsandpublications/Documents/APTA-PT-Knowledge-Economy.pdf>.

¹² Id. pg. 44.

Conclusion

Imagine Nicholasville Road and the recommendations and roadmap included therein are the innovative strategies we must implement to encourage smart, sustainable, and equitable growth in our community. The recommendations and action plan proposed by Planning Staff carefully take into consideration our existing conditions, our objective needs, community members' desires, and offer transformative opportunities for developing the Nicholasville Road corridor in a way that will be advantageous to all Lexingtonians.

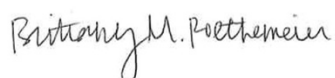
Encouraging responsible utilization of existing land for infill and redevelopment, increasing opportunities for diverse housing options, offering safe, multi-modal transportation options, increasing economic opportunities and affordability, access and equity in housing and transit are all achieved by this proposal. As the recommendations are implemented, special consideration will need to be taken to preserve the residential character of existing neighborhoods, and to prevent and mitigate displacement of existing residents and vulnerable communities as new investments are made. Design standards and complete street policies will be critical as we move forward, and engagement with the public as these are pursued will be required for their success. Fayette Alliance stands ready to assist in any way possible as this work continues and looks forward to being an active participant in this transformative vision.

Imagine Nicholasville Road, on its face, is consistent with the 20-year vision set forth in Imagine Lexington. Our City's work towards implementation of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan is evident in these types of transformative proposals and we applaud Planning Staff for their hard work in making this vision a reality.

Fayette Alliance appreciates the Planning Staff's and Planning Commission's leadership in these efforts and respectfully recommends the approval and adoption of Imagine Nicholasville Road into Imagine Lexington.

I know how committed each of you are to Lexington. On behalf of the Fayette Alliance, I sincerely thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Brittany M. Roethemeier
Executive Director