Old Town Visioning Committee
Notes from June 13, 2019 Meeting

PART 1: WALKING SWOT ANALYSIS

Old Town Strengths
- Small businesses (mom and pop)
- Lots of growth potential (physically) – empty space
- GMU as a draw – brings business, entrainment
- Great scale and character
- Good restaurants
- Walking downtown
- OK parking (free)
- Bus connections to GMU
- Proximity to courthouse
- Nucleus: defined downtown (Hub)
- Diverse population
- High income demographics
- High traffic
- Small government
- Rich history and culture
- Many community events
- Engaged community (elected and public)
- Central location in County to draw from
- Name recognition – "Fairfax"
- Hometown feel
- Strong staff and economic development structure in place
- Lower community rents
- Physical location of downtown – 2 schools, government, biggest parks, walkable single-family neighborhoods
- Workforce at Courts / Detention Center
- Relative proximity to I-66

Old Town Weaknesses
- Signage is confusing and inadequate (wayfinding) – directional, traffic, parking
- Guidelines are more restrictive (land use)
  - Zone density between zones (historic and transition)
- Regulation overreach
  - Affects development – cost of doing business
  - Taxes/property valuations
- Traffic – speed/volume, granite curbs a hazard for drivers
- Candidness of work between private sector and government officials

- Lack of business diversity, and long-term leases control the shopping center
- Designated downtown – needs more area to make impact
- Lack of economic incentives for new and existing businesses
- Lack of walkability and cohesion
- Lack of entertainment venues and unique retail
- Difficult for developers to deal with
- Insufficient street grid or bypasses
- All pass through traffic/no strong reason to stop
- 18% of registered voters vote
- Street closures/detours
- Limited housing
- Requires heavy marketing to make people aware of the location and its attributes.
- Desired redevelopment may not be the highest and best use at this time
- Needs more parallel street/teaser parking

Old Town Opportunities
- GMU integration
    - Business startups – incubator
    - Benefits for GMU faculty , staff, City residents
    - Physical GMU – schools/learning center inside City limits
- Increased residential density with redevelopment
- Increased walkability
- Increased retail density with redevelopment (independent small business)
- Integrate Massey site with Old Town
- Marketing to Oakton, North Hill
- Create identity/branding/sense of place
- Embrace technology (e.g. autonomous vehicles)
- SMART city
- Leverage history – tourism opportunity
- Schools
- Increase open space
- Capstone
- Street entertainment
- Pop up galleries
- Business/student connection
- Connecting to regional trails
- Cultural tourism – art , DC
- Proximity to air travel
- Regional partners = county, GMU, Inova
- Amazon and tech growth
- Highly educated workforce
- Tech economic development sector (defense, tech, etc.)
- Hometown feel

- Involved business owners
- Cross marketing with City planning for town square and library as well as other businesses.
- Convenience of grocery store and pharmacy

Old Town Threats
- Fairfax County as competition/aggressive economic development
- Mosaic District as competition/aggressive economic development
- Structural / Market changes
- External Investment (outside City limits)
  - Arlington, Silver line, Orange line expansion
- Federal Government shutdown
- Metro not in Old Town
- Regional traffic gridlock
- Gas prices/Disposable income
- GMU can meet its needs internally with entertainment / dining – not relying on City
- Online retail
- Food delivery services
- Changing spending habits – generational
- Economic volatility
- Competition with other City Activity Centers
- Status quo/complacency/NIMBY-ism
- High profile/visible commercial vacancies
- Lots of businesses come and go

PART 2: DEBRIEF CONVERSATION ABOUT SWOT DATA

Leveraging Strengths to Maximize Opportunities
1) **Integrate George Mason** more fully into the life of the City
   a. Capstone – 700+ beds, more retail
   b. Need for more housing in City for both students and faculty
   c. Could capitalize on student/faculty/parents as customers
2) **Economic Growth** – increase density with redevelopment
   a. Increase retail/residential density
   b. Tech growth – more people
   c. GMU – tech side of university growing due to more regional jobs in tech
3) **History & Culture**
   a. increase cultural tourism,
   b. Use technology to connect people who want to come here/tour (perhaps by working with GMU to create apps?)
4) **Capitalize on having a hub/nucleus** – create a sense of space
   a. Provide a sense of "city"/urban environment that attracts millennials, all ages
   b. Increase density – encourage more people to live here

     c. Create more "entry level" and regionally-affordable housing

     d. Fewer cars

     e. GMU faculty/students here more will add to a sense of community

5) **High traffic** – people go through here, so we need to attract people to live here/stay here

Leveraging Strengths to Minimize Threats

1) **Learning from threats** – what has already been done that we can do better given our strengths?
2) **Maximize cultural/historic draw** – City's cultural/historical uniqueness can't be replicated by Mosaic, etc.
3) **Take advantage of our structure** – Small, independent City can be nimble/flexible, not beholden to investors
4) **Better maximize relationship with GMU** – stable, diversifies our economic base
5) **Maximize Regional partnerships around technology economy** – tech focus – yield more workers, business/jobs

Maximize Opportunities to Overcome Weaknesses

1) **Leverage better marketing** – signage, banners, marketing to business community ("we are open for business")
2) **Become more business friendly**
     a. Tipping point/time of change with new City leadership
     b. Possibility of being more progressive now?
3) **Increase walkability**
4) **Increase hotel/conference space**
     a. Address lack of business diversity and amount of pass through traffic
5) **30,000 consumers are 1 mile away**
     a. What will draw GMU students to create entertainment and a more walkable environment?
     b. How to diversify ourselves to create an economic strategy that brings housing, diversity, attracts businesses and people to be able to compete with other places