

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

## Lessons Learned from the Redevelopment of Tysons, Virginia: Progress toward Walkability and Density Goals 10 Years into the Plan

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Policymakers in Fairfax County, Virginia, passed an ambitious redevelopment plan for the Tysons area in 2010, in anticipation of a new Metrorail line, hoping to transform a suburban, car-oriented area into a walkable, transit-oriented downtown. Notably, the plan reformed zoning rules to allow for much more development, especially the construction of high-rise multifamily housing, in this wealthy suburban community on the outskirts of Washington, DC.

In “[The Politics of Redevelopment Planning in Tysons and Outcomes 10 Years Later](#),” Emily Hamilton finds that the Tysons area has been more successful in its progress toward the goal of housing construction than the goal of walkability.

### **GOOD PROGRESS TOWARD THE RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION OBJECTIVES IN TYSONS**

The shortage of housing in the places where people want to live is a challenge across the country. The shortage is greatest in high-income suburban jurisdictions such as Fairfax County. Many current reform efforts to allow more housing construction focus on single-family zoning. In 2019, for example, Oregon rolled back existing single-family zoning for much of the state, and in 2020 legislators in five other US states introduced similar bills.

Fairfax County policymakers took a different approach to the problem. The Tysons redevelopment plan permits construction of multifamily buildings on land that had been previously zoned for commercial use, leaving single-family neighborhoods untouched. The 2010 redevelopment plan for Tysons is currently on track to meet its target of adding 80,000 more residents by the middle of this century. Thousands of new arrivals have already been able to move into this part of a wealthy suburban county.

### **LESS PROGRESS TOWARD WALKABILITY GOALS**

The redevelopment plan sought to turn Tysons into a walkable downtown with a mix of office, residential, and retail spaces near the Metro stations. The Tysons plan framed the permitting of more multifamily housing as a means to achieve greater walkability, attract a residential population that would support local businesses, and create livelier sidewalks and public spaces. So far, however, car-oriented infrastructure remains an important obstacle to walkability.

Rather than going underground, the new Metro line was built above ground in the center of major, pedestrian-hostile arterials. The stations are elevated, too, and have to be reached by long pedestrian bridges. The station placement has resulted in the development of little more than “islands” of walkability in Tysons.

## KEY TAKEAWAY

The redevelopment plan for Tysons was framed as a bold effort to transform a suburban, highway-oriented place dominated by office parks and shopping malls into walkable neighborhoods. Little progress has been made in this regard to date. However, the plan has been more successful in its efforts to promote new housing. Tysons thus serves as one example of overcoming regulatory barriers to new housing that have been politically difficult to overcome in other high-demand locations that are demographically similar to Fairfax County.