UNRAVELING ROSSLYN
Arlington officials aim to fix 50 years of planning mistakes — and create a whole new skyline.

BY MICHAEL NEIBAUER | PAGE 26

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WASH Biz
Iridium CEO’s honest appraisal
Matt Desch said the company’s new network of satellites will keep Iridium in business, but that was not a foregone conclusion.
JILL A. AITORO, 14

D.C.’s newest hospital owner
If all goes as planned, a Connecticut hedge fund will own D.C.’s only two long-term acute-care hospitals. But just who is Silver Point?
TINA REED, 16

A culinary community
Al Goldberg went looking for a home for his catering business. He ended up finding an incubator for foodies everywhere.
REBECCA COOPER, 6

EXECUTIVE PROFILE
He’ll build you a home — and beat you at tennis
ED BERSOFF

RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE COMPANIES 32
CENTER STAGE: Your home, for sale 36
HOST HOTELS TOPS LIST OF PUBLIC REITs 38
As part of our cover story, Staff Reporter Michael Neubauer sat down with many of the region’s business and government leaders, including Andrew Vankorhn of The JBG Cos., left, and Arlington County Board Chair Jay Fisette, for a free-flowing discussion about the future of Rosslyn.

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THE LIST

The nine-month program provides next-generation leaders with unique expertise to develop the planning and policy initiatives, resources and key players impacting the Washington region.

Applicants are now being accepted for the 2015 ULI program.
“It was built on a lumberyard and I think it opened in 1966,” said Chris Hanesian, executive vice president of Snell Properties, which co-owns the Ames Center with Caruthers Properties LLC. “It was a signature high-rise, a signature office building, home to a federal government agency.”

But times have changed.

In 1962, Ames was representative of new Rosslyn, as described by the county, where “conflict between pedestrian and vehicular traffic would be minimized,” where an “internal loop” road would serve every building, where an “ideally located problem area could be redeveloped to meet the high demand for new office space within the limits of established public policy.”

Fifty years later, Ames is a reminder of everything that’s wrong with Rosslyn — an underutilized property, with nothing to offer anyone on foot, that is nearing the end of its useful life. The 1962 plan led to planning mistake after planning mistake. “For the past 20 years, we’ve been unwinding that, block by block,” said Andrew Van Horn, principal with The JBG Cos., a firm with a massive investment in a modern, vital Rosslyn, from its Central Place to the future Rosslyn Gateway.

That “unwinding” is about to get even more dramatic, with major blocks of Rosslyn primed for redevelopment and county officials embarking on a new plan that will fix the mistakes of the past and set the neighborhood on a new course for the next several decades. Its success is vital to many Washingtonians: Not only is Rosslyn a major commuter thoroughfare, it’s perhaps the most important office district outside of downtown D.C. and now features some of the priciest real estate in the region. And for many, it represents Washington’s only true skyline.

Despite its problems, the 1962 plan did what it was designed to do: Between 1960 and 1970, Rosslyn experienced a surge in office construction — 2.7 million square feet in that decade alone. Another 1 million square feet followed in the 1970s, and 3.5 million more in the 1980s.

What followed Ames — 23 office buildings in the 1960s, or the 27 more that followed in the two succeeding decades — will not be easy to unravel. Rosslyn’s transformation into “Arlington’s world-class downtown,” as the county wants it to be perceived, is a work in progress.

The county is coming to the end of the 15-month Realize Rosslyn process, a sector plan update designed to breathe life into Arlington’s “front door,” to broaden the mix of uses, to improve mobility — to create a place.

“What we see on the ground today, we continue to improve upon and build upon,” said Bob Duffy, Arlington’s planning director. “It’s a new city. So much has been accomplished. And there’s so much potential. This plan is going to carry Rosslyn forward for the next generation. It’s that important.”

Tomorrowland gone awry

That Rosslyn needs fixing is nothing new to the powers-that-be. Maybe the epiphany came in 1992, 15 years after the opening of the Ames Center. That was the year Interstate 66 cutting off 50 acres between Rosslyn and the Potomac River — touted as a positive in a 1965 publication — was wrong.

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years after the Rosslyn Metro station welcomed its first passengers, when the county updated the Rosslyn Station Area Plan with a smarter growth bent. While that document recognized the importance of pedestrian safety and sidewalks, not skywalks, as the main people mover, it still envisioned only 12- and 13-story “focal” office buildings in the core, by the Metro, on what the Arlington board called “central place.”

Or maybe the epiphany came in 1993, when Arlington finally abandoned plans to develop the elevated “Loop Road Bridge” — a project that would have ensured Rosslyn remained auto-oriented for decades to come. Loop Road was ultimately refashioned into the elevated Freedom Park.

No, Rosslyn’s renewal is best tracked to 1996, when the county acknowledged that its core demanded something more city-like. That year, the board created the “C-O Rosslyn” zoning, which allowed for 300-foot-tall, high-density towers within roughly a quarter-mile of the increasingly crowded Metrorail station.

The instant that was created as an option for developers to redevelop their property and — in some cases, double or triple the density that they have today — once that started to occur, it was already starting to move in a direction beyond what the sector plan had envisioned," said Anthony Van Horn, the Arlington planning point person to Realize Rosslyn.

With the C-O in place, several modern towers followed — among them 1801 N. Lynn and the Waterview from JBG, Turnberry Tower and, most recently, Monday Properties’ shining, but still tenantless, 1812 N. Moore St.

“Individually it’s been doing that project by project, but this effort is really taking a look at the broader whole and trying to ensure with future development it all fits into place,” Fusarelli said.

**Power to the pedestrian**

Rosslyn features, from the right angle or the right floor, spectacular views of the Potomac River and the District. It is a short walk to Georgetown. It is crisscrossed by popular trails.

It includes roughly 50 existing buildings, about half of which will be, or may be, demolished and replaced over the next 30 years with 4.4 million square feet of office space, 1,300 residential buildings, 600 hotel rooms and 200,000 square feet of ground-floor retail.

It is a process — tearing down the skywalks, demolishing the 40-year-old office properties, luring new residents to new residential buildings, and developing a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly community that doesn’t shut down at 5 p.m.

Just in the last two years, Rosslyn has seen the introduction of the Sedona and Slate apartments from JBG, the delivery of Heavy Seas Alehouse on North Oak Street, the innovation of 1500 Wilson’s street-level retail.

Nothing is more important to Rosslyn’s renewal than bringing people down to the street. The Rosslyn transit may be in transition, but it still affects the Rosslyn of 1975. The lack of pedestrian and bicycle-friendly infrastructure, dangerous intersections exceed retail options, too few restrooms and remaining skywalks continue to drive tens of thousands of commuters away from the sidewalks and straight to their cars, or to Metro.

“I think most people would rather just run across the street, risk getting hit rather than going up into the skywalk system,” Hanessian said. “It doesn’t work. Times have changed.”

Focus groups conducted by the Rosslyn Business Improvement District have revealed two priorities, said Mary-Claire Burick, BID executive director: more retail, more bars, more restaurants. And a supermarket.

How does Arlington move people from the sky to retail? Other than demolishing the bridges, which will come down with adjacent development, Van Horn suggests, it means literally changing direction.

“I honestly believe a lot of that’s driven by two-wayng Fort Myer and Lynn, [both one-way streets],” Van Horn said. “It’s low-hanging fruit. It’s a little complicated at the ends, but I think there’s a lot of value to Rosslyn. You have traffic going both ways and you can park north or south and access retail. You can create a better place for retail, a better place for pedestrians.”

Green is the new black

Reclaiming Rosslyn’s streets for pedestrians is one Arlington goal. Creating new gathering spaces, whether Gateway Park at the foot of the Key Bridge or the Rosslyn Esplanade, a grand mixed-use boulevard planned for the community’s northern and eastern edges, is another.

For Brian Harner, an Arlington planning commissioner and chair of the Realize Rosslyn process panel, it’s something that should be started now.

“A coordinated investment in public space would be the one thing that we could do now that would be really significant,” Harner said. “That might be public-private investment to transform Gateway Park. It might be building the first piece

**RAILS AND TRAILS**

**TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS FOR ROSSLYN**

Rosslyn is a transportation hub — a crowded one. Metro station capacity is maxed out between the Blue and Orange lines. Roads are jammed, and there’s no additional capacity on the Key Bridge. Trails get backed up and intersections are dangerous. And it will only get worse with the impending introduction of the Silver Line.

Here are a few options that have been discussed, either in detail or in vague terms, to address Rosslyn’s mobility challenges.

**SECOND METRO STATION**

In 2012, Blue Line Metro service through Rosslyn was drastically scaled back, both to prepare for the Silver Line opening and support Orange Line demand. With only one tunnel running beneath the Potomac, Rosslyn is Metro’s biggest choke point. As part of its long-term planning, Metro has suggested building a second Rosslyn station to serve a new Blue Line. The $1 billion station would feature an underground passageway to the existing station.

**STREETCAR**

D.C. has proposed to extend its fledgling streetcar to Georgetown. It doesn’t make any sense, Arlington officials say, not to carry it across the river. “If D.C. is looking to expand its streetcar system, we would actively be working with D.C. to identify an alignment that allows that streetcar to actually connect to Metro,” said Arlington Board Chairman Jay Fisette. “The streetcar system works at its best and its most efficient when it interconnects with the existing heavy rail system.”

**ESCALATOR**

The Realize Rosslyn plan suggests a “public outdoor escalator” along 18th Street North that “mitigates the climb to Rosslyn’s higher elevations.” “There is a need to look at alternative ways to move pedestrians, make that connection across the river,” said Arlington Planning Director Bob Duffy.

**GONDOLA**

The Georgetown Business Improvement District has pitched the idea of linking the two sides of the Potomac via a high-capacity gondola. The BID is raising money for a feasibility study.

**TRAILS**

Realize Rosslyn, building on past plans, envisions a pair of cycle tracks on North Lynn and Fort Myer Drive, multiuse trails to the east through the Esplanade, improvements to Key Bridge trail access, a new connection to Roosevelt Island and at least one new crossing over I-66.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 28**
of the Esplanade. It might be working on the streets and, on a holistic basis, transforming a large segment of streets with new sidewalks. That kind of statement about investment and transformation, targeted, so that something happens early.”

The Esplanade represents the ideal, the reconnection of Rosslyn to the Potomac Via a realigned North Arlington Ridge Boulevard, a new connection to Roosevelt Island, and a large, level park, field and trail system running from Wilson Boulevard to North Lynn Street.

The project is especially complex, however, given it requires not only the Rosslyn Plaza’s redevelopment (between North Arlington Ridge Road and North Kent Street) by Vornado Realty Trust and Gould Property Co., but also a new deck over I-66 — the highway that cut off Rosslyn’s access to its riverfront.

The Esplanade buildout is years away, if it happens ever.

That said, Rosslyn will get greener, and relatively soon, with a new public plaza and fountain at JBG’s two-tower Central Place, adjacent to the Metro station, and the proposed 18th Street pedestrian-only corridor between North Oak and North Lynn streets, as envisioned in Realize Rosslyn.

Monday Properties has a site plan before the county now to create the first leg of the pedestrian corridor as part of its redevelopment of 1401 Wilson Blvd. and 1400 Key Blvd. The Ames’ owners are expected to follow suit, in about a decade when the Art Institute’s lease expires, with a pair of “substantial buildings” split by the pedestrian plaza.

“The minute we get Central Place fixed and we get two beautiful buildings and a central plaza with retail on two floors all the way around it, that’s the heart, that will transform,” Arlington Board Chairman Jay Fisette said.

More people, more activity

Rosslyn is home to about 11,000 residents. Central Place, 1400 Key and Rosslyn Plaza, among other projects to come, will draw several thousand more.

“That really is what drives the retail,” Burick said. “Rather than the sidewalks rolling up at 5 p.m., that’s what keeps the streets vibrant. That transformation to a mixed-use community is really going to be a selling point.”

Burick, on the job as Rosslyn BID director for only eight months, has seen the other, all-too-familiar side of Rosslyn. She used to work for Allbritton Communications Co. at 1000 Wilson Blvd. Like so many other commuters, she came, she worked, she went home.

“I’ll admit I was one of those that sort of came to the office and left,” Burick said. “There weren’t the restaurants and the bars we have today.”

Future Rosslyn will feature “concentrated nodes” of activity, extending the bustle beyond Central Place and the Metro. Without a moving sidewalk, as Realize Rosslyn envisions, the daunting Rosslyn hill is mitigated somewhat, Burick said. If there are reasons to stop along the way, today, there are few.

At the very top of the mount, The Penzance Cos. is in the earliest stages of planning the redevelopment of 1555 Wilson and surrounding parcels into a mixed-use community. Monday Properties controls the destiny of the hill’s center, as it owns 1401, 1500, 1501 and 1515 Wilson, plus 1400 Key, all of which are targeted for new projects over the next three decades.

Toward I-66, Vornado and Gould have submitted plans for Rosslyn Plaza, to include 1.8 million square feet of office, 350 residential units, a hotel and more than 90,000 square feet of retail. The partner-
Monday Properties has submitted plans to redevelop two existing office properties, both of which sit between North Oak and North Nash streets. The Key property will be home to a residential building anchored by a new supermarket. The Wilson property will be redeveloped as office. A pedestrian-only plaza will split the two, along the alignment of 18th Street North, which currently ends at North Oak. The site plans are under review by the county.

Rosslyn Gateway: JBG and MacFarlane Partners have an approved site plan to redevelop roughly 2.2 acres currently occupied by 1901 and 1911 Fort Myer Drive, with a 26-story residential/hotel building (146 keys and 133 luxury residential units), a 25-story, 320,000-square-foot office building, and another 20-story residential building. JBG is not expected to start work until Central Place is complete.

Rosslyn Plaza: Vornado Realty Trust and partner Gould Property Co. have proposed to redevelop the existing Rosslyn Plaza, currently dominated by aging office and apartment buildings, with 1.8 million square feet of office space, up to 700 residential units, 300 hotel rooms, and more than 80,000 square feet of retail and a couple acres of open space. The project would replace six buildings — 1601, 1611, 1621 and 1777 N. Kent St. and the London and Normandy apartments — and the Spectrum Theater. This conceptual rendering, from Pickard Chilton, is part of the site plan process and meant to show the developers’ intent to create an imaginative, iconic skyline.

WHERE PLANNING SHOULD ANTICIPATE CHANGE” OVER THE NEXT 30 YEARS

1. Central Place: JBG has started construction on the first phase of this massive project, a 31-story, 355-unit residential tower between North Lynn and North Moore streets, on the north side of the new high-speed Metro elevators, and a public plaza featuring outdoor seating, a splash fountain and space for community events. The second phase, a 521,000-square-foot office tower, will sit immediately to the south of the new elevators.

2. 1401 Wilson Blvd. and 1400 Key Blvd.: Monday Properties has submitted plans to redevelop these two existing office properties, both of which sit between North Oak and North Nash streets. The Key property will be home to a residential building anchored by a new supermarket. The Wilson property will be redeveloped as office. A pedestrian-only plaza will split the two, along the alignment of 18th Street North, which currently ends at North Oak. The site plans are under review by the county.

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5. 1200 Wilson and 1701 N. Fort Myer: Monday Properties owns these adjacent office properties, which sit between Wilson Boulevard and 17th Street. Monday Properties also owns these twin office properties, one of which houses the oft-maligned Rosslyn Safeway, and the other the new Heavy Seas Alehouse and Roti in its new, street-level retail spaces.

6. 1500 Wilson Blvd.: This 17-story, 250,000-square-foot office building, owned by the Penzance Cos., lost its only tenant, the Department of Defense, as a result of base realignment and closure. Mostly vacant, the property recently underwent a major overhaul, to include a new glass curtainwall facade, a modern lobby and 30,000 new square feet of retail.

7. 1555 Wilson Blvd.: Another Penzance property (and home to the Washington Business Journal), this declining office building at the top of the Rosslyn hill will get the wrecking ball some day, as part of a redevelopment of several public and privately owned parcels between Wilson and 18th Street North.

8. Holiday Inn: Located at 1900 N. Fort Myer Dr., the hotel sits on the west side of Fort Myer Drive, while JBG’s Rosslyn Gateway sits on the east side. Both are immediately south of Gateway Park.

9. Rosslyn Overlook: TIAA-CREF owns this 18-story, 303,592-square-foot Class A building at 1616 N. Fort Myer Drive, which also fronts North Fairfax Drive, just north of Route 50.

10. Architects Building: Pacesetter Miliken Enterprises Inc. owns this 12-story building at 1400 Wilson Blvd., which was designed and built in 1965 to house the American Institute of Architects. It is currently 100 percent occupied by the State Department.

The ship has described its multiphase development, facing the Potomac, the Watergate and the Kennedy Center, as a new “front door.”

To the north, JBG has an approved site plan for Rosslyn Gateway, which will feature two new residential buildings (one paired with a hotel) and an office tower, and the likely, much-needed overhaul of Rosslyn Gateway Park.

Arlington was convinced in 1965 that the Rosslyn hill will get the wrecking ball some day, as part of a redevelopment of several public and privately owned parcels between Wilson and 18th Street North.

“I think in the last several years alone, you’re noticing a significant change in the street front activity,” Duffy said, “and it’s really a start of what the Realize Rosslyn Plan is attempting to expand on.”

Rosslyn would create an exciting, convenient, efficient new downtown for all, that I-66 was a blessing, and that with public and private support, Rosslyn would "become an unparalleled example of cooperative urban rebuilding."