

Aurora Highlands Civic Association

Minutes from Monthly Meeting

Wednesday, 12 April 2017

DRAFT

Attendees: 10 people signed in. About 31 attended.

Proceedings:

President Natasha Atkins called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

The Minutes for the March meeting were approved.

Grill Kabob Update

Representatives of Grill Kabob located on 23rd Street at Eads discussed their request for a use permit to allow music until 2 a.m. The restaurant now closes at 11 p.m. They currently have a second floor and will be adding a rooftop area within about 7 months. They will have brunch on their new rooftop, but do not plan to have much music there and will have acoustic blockers. Lighting on the roof would be dim. The 1,400-foot roof will accommodate 100 people and will be for dining only with background music. They will have live music or a DJ on the second floor, but no live music on the roof. The owners said that their concept is an upscale lounge with a sinners and saints/heaven and hell concept.

Their use permit request is up for review at the May 20 County Board meeting.

Natasha said that County staff have asked our concerns and light and sound levels are the two primary issues for our neighborhood.

In response to a neighbor's concerns about fights on 23rd Street, they said the restaurant will have a security staff.

The company has 13 kabob locations, a lounge in Sterling, and a banquet hall.

Christian Dorsey, County Board Member

Mr. Dorsey said that he was aware of our Virginia Highlands Park renovation concerns and thought that we would be pleased by the County's presentation on this, which he was not able to stay for. He discussed the upcoming County budget and tax rate increase, the amount of work

that went into the budget, the difficulty of prioritizing needs, the necessary increases for schools and Metro. It requires \$7-8 million a year to provide for the 700-1,000 additional school kids in Arlington each year. Arlington's share of the increase in Metro's operating budget is \$12 million. A one-cent tax increase would be required just to pay for that. He realizes that there are concerns about tax increases, but said that we cannot raid our reserves. They are there for a purpose and determine Arlington's credit-worthiness. Metro should be more reliable moving forward with the Blue Line restored and new cars. Metro fares are supposed to be reviewed every 2 years. How will we manage growth in Arlington? It is less than 1 percent a year, but is concentrated in a few areas such as ours. The Board is working collaboratively to sustain and improve what we like about Arlington and its quality of life.

Mr. Dorsey addressed a number of concerns and questions raised by the community:

--Metro says that the cost of collecting fares is offset by the fare itself. The SmarTrip system still works, but there may need to be changes in senior fares to base them on both age and income. In some stations, lax policing of fare jumpers is a problem.

--How can we be sure that County money is going where it is needed? He said that Arlington is transparent about where money is going. \$17 million is for Metro and schools.

--We must find ways to cross-utilize our facilities. Schools are civic institutions. \$500 million a year goes to our schools or 46.3 cents of each tax dollar. The massive tree loss during construction at Wakefield, Jefferson, and the new HB was pointed out with a request that the County arborist work with new school building and renovation projects from the outset.

--The County is working on constructive engagement with citizens. He said they need to let people know the constraints and not just open up a proposal to comments without setting parameters. People should be heard, responded to, and there should be follow-up. Government can't always do what the loudest voices want.

--Concerns were also voiced about urging managers of multi-family units to get community input; Metro problems such as non-enforcement of the food rules and time to complete Safetrack; the increase in income inequality in Arlington; affordable housing and zoning incentives for it; and immigrant services.

Virginia Highlands Park Renovation

Diane Probus, Susan Kalish, and Scott McPartlin from the County Parks and Recreation staff presented the Virginia Highlands Park Framework Plan (VHPFP), which is a process overview. The VHPFP is intended to guide development in the park for the upcoming renovation and further into the future. It was originally to start this spring, but because of community concerns, was stepped back and will kick off this summer. The East side of the park is mostly renovated, but the facilities on the West side, such as those for softball and petanque, are beyond their

useful life. They said DPR would look at the existing facilities and at what the community wants. They must also consider safety and ADA requirements, etc. Public participation and engagement will be transparent through the IAP2 process. There are many steps including a charrette. The process will be intense and hard-hitting. There have been many questions from many groups. They will post a briefing book online and will hire consultants. The kick-off will be this summer. He said that he wanted to know what other groups should be included, how to best reach the community, and how to keep everyone informed through the process.

They are not to the stage where they can discuss what will actually be in the park when it is done. He has carefully read the 16-page report on our website. He thinks the goals in that report can be met. He acknowledged concerns about lighting, crime, outside use, no green space, pervious surfaces, trees, but he focused on facilities. They do not weigh opinions. It is not just a popularity contest. They want all groups to win. It is an iterative process and they will develop answers through the briefing book.

In answer to a direct question from Natasha Atkins about the possibility of alternative uses for the current softball fields, Mr. McPartlin stated definitively that the softball fields will stay and that any change there is NOT up for consideration. After a spirited discussion about who actually makes the decision about the ball fields, he said that the only way to get any change in the use of that area would be to submit a request directly to the County Board. Only the Board could make a decision to change the use of the existing ball fields.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Date: _____

Maureen Quinn

Recording Secretary