

Aurora Highlands Civic Association

Monthly Meeting Minutes

April 11, 2018

DRAFT

Attendees: 28 people signed in, including 21 AHCA members.

Proceedings:

President Natasha Atkins called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. in the Aurora Hills Senior Center.

--Arlington Police Corporal James O'Daniel reported that there have been 4 home burglaries in our neighborhood recently. Keep everything locked and call the police if you notice suspicious activity either at your house or at a neighbor's house.

Virginia Highlands Park West Side

Natasha opened the discussion with some background on Virginia Highlands Park. In 1976 the County Board approved a plan for Pentagon City that included 15 acres that the developer gave to the County for the park. There are now 10,000 people in our area, a big increase from then. We will be discussing the West side of the park. Does its current use make sense given current population density? The softball field fences came down last fall and we appreciate that, but we've still got the fields. The County has a public engagement plan and a master plan for the park is being considered. Staff members from the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) are here to discuss better use of the space and possible changes now and in the future.

Wilfredo Calderon, DPR, introduced several staff members. Susan Kalish, communications director, announced that the Friends of Aurora Highlands Parks group will receive the Bill Thomas Park Service Award on April 24.

Mr. Calderon said that the future of the park depends on the County, stakeholders and the public. The public engagement process will be collaborative. The master plan, which is a long-term solution, is on hold until they listen to all sides. A concern was raised that input coming from neighbors should get more weight than that from other groups. Mr. Calderon said that input from the community is critical, but the process must be collaborative and inclusive.

DPR has already moved the fence line and previously the fields were "permit-only." Now they are "permit takes priority." That is a temporary measure. Field permits can be for activities other than softball, such as our recent spring community event. The softball fields get high intensity use during short periods of time.

There are criteria and a priority list for the allocation of permits for the fields. Social leagues make up about 2 percent of total field use county-wide. There is a 66-percent residency requirement for teams

using fields and payment is required. Social teams provide half of the total revenue. DC Fray uses Virginia Highlands Park fields a lot because they are adult fields. Arlington has the most use by DC Fray of all local counties and jurisdictions. DPR leagues play Monday-Thursday evenings until the lights go out.

DPR constantly evaluates and checks on the use of courts and fields. If you see unauthorized use of park facilities call DPR.

Dogs are allowed on the fields only on a leash with their owner, who must clean up after them. There is a process for petitioning the County for a dog park. We have already done that beginning about 10 years ago. Our area is the most deficient of dog parks in the whole County. DPR will look at our previous dog park requests. One member said that dogs are a revenue source for big apartments that charge tenants more for having a dog and the County should tap into that money for dog parks.

A concern was raised that not all stakeholders would be represented in the public engagement process, such as people who walk, play Frisbee, read a book on a park bench, watch birds, etc. The sports groups get louder recognition because they have "names." Does DPR believe that open space is a "facility?" Natural/open space is a legitimate park use, but the County over-programs all space for sports. DPR says that the County does value open space, but they are grappling with the casual use concept. Open space is a natural resource. Mr. Calderon said they will look at how to get more open space back.

A DC Fray representative said that they will take any time and any space for their games. DC Fray, which includes Arlington and Alexandria, has no problem with the County's residency requirements for use of sports space. They also work with pick-up players. He said the community should see them as part of the solution. They want to be a partner in the dialog.

A question was asked about what is happening with the CIP funds for Aurora Highlands Park. DPR says to stay involved and share ideas with them on how space can be used. They don't know when the master plan will be done, but keep watching for milestones and next steps.

31st Street Site

The Department of Environmental Services (DES) is ready to start the invasive plant treatment process. It will take 5 years to eradicate the bamboo, English ivy, and kudzu. It will require chemical treatment and re-treatment. The areas treated will be marked. They will inspect existing trees, chop some down and plant some new ones. People are concerned about the use of herbicides on bamboo and other invasives and about the chemicals getting into the soil. DES says that they have seen good results with the treatments they plan to use and that native plants do come back. A neighbor close to the site described his problem when an animal ran through crushed bait boxes on the site and tracked the poison to his dog. He is trying to get restitution for his vet bills from the County. DES says that trees are holding up the hill on the edge of the site that goes up to neighbors' yards. They will do some planting on the hill. Neighbors are also concerned about property values and the lack of privacy when everything is torn down. They need a visual barrier between them and the site. A concern was also raised about the lack of security on the site.

Oakridge Walk Zone Update

Nancy Duncan, AHCA's walk zone review representative said that the County will not be making any change in the Oakridge walk zone. APS is looking for more efficiencies, more walkers and fewer buses County wide. This effort feeds into the boundary change initiative. The School Board will be making boundary decisions and our area will be deeply affected. Students here may be split among three elementary schools. Arlington Ridge Civic Association is sending a letter to APS to encourage them to keep neighborhood students together.

Water Treatment Plant

Neighbor Paul Guttridge, AHCA's liaison to the Water Pollution Control Plant, read a letter he drafted for AHCA to send to the County asking them to negotiate with DC to truck solids from our plant to their Blue Plains facility. This is a follow-up to a motion passed at our March meeting. **A motion to accept the letter as written was unanimously passed.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

Maureen Quinn

Recording Secretary