



## Aurora Highlands Civic Association

Minutes from Monthly Meeting

Wednesday, 10 February 2016

### MINUTES

Attendees: 35 members (see attached sign-in sheet pages 1-2).

Proceedings:

- Meeting called to order at 7:05 PM, by President Natasha Atkins.
- *Community Updates*
  - Natasha informed everyone about the revised CivFed resolution on parkland acquisition (it was changed from a fixed dollar amount to be spent on new parkland per year to a goal of acquiring – at a minimum – an average of 3 acres of parkland per year for the next 10 years).
  - February 2016's social will be a happy hour at Sine Irish Restaurant and Pub in Pentagon Row. It will be on February 25 @ 7 PM.
  - We are looking for snow removal volunteers. AHCA is now participating in the county's snow blower loaner program. If you would like to help out, you will need training on use of the machine and a background check by the County. Please contact Les Garrison for more information.
  - We are looking for newsletter volunteers. If you can take a route – even a small one, please contact Les Garrison or Natasha.
  - If you have legos that you can donate, please contact Mike Dowell. They will be used as part of the upcoming Passport to Summer program.
  - For the east side renovations of Virginia Highlands park, there will be a ribbon cutting ceremony on March 13. AHCA leadership is still trying to firm up a time with the county.
- *Planning for School Capacity*
  - Natasha introduced our guest speakers – School Board Chair Emma Violand-Sanchez and Zach Larnard from Arlington Public Schools Planning staff.
  - Zach gave a presentation about the upcoming schools capital improvement plan (CIP) process. The presentation is located on the school board's website at



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[http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/110/Community%20Stakeholder%20Meeting1\\_Final\\_FO\\_Team.pdf](http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/110/Community%20Stakeholder%20Meeting1_Final_FO_Team.pdf)

- Members asked questions about capacity at Oakridge, including: (1) the status of a joint civic association letter from October 2015 regarding redoing the Aurora Hills Community Center/Library as a joint facility to include an elementary school and (2) the community input phase for the South Arlington Working Group's (SAWG) recommendation on a new school in the Pentagon City area post-2019. They were unable to answer several questions on the spot and asked if we could follow up with them in writing. The follow up letter can be found here:  
[http://aurorahighlands.org/wp-content/uploads/2-11-16-Dear-Chairperson-Violand.na\\_.pdf](http://aurorahighlands.org/wp-content/uploads/2-11-16-Dear-Chairperson-Violand.na_.pdf) Additional follow-up correspondence with the School Board can be found on AHCA's website.
  - The school board chair committed to having a discussion with the relevant civic associations in our area regarding the SAWG's recommendation on planning for a new school in the Pentagon City area post-2019.
  - The School Board Chair encouraged AHCA members to also voice our views on capacity solutions at the school board's CIP community forums – the next ones are scheduled for February 17 and 24.
- *For Discussion*
    - Virginia Highlands Park Committee Proposal
      - Natasha gave some background information. She and Mike Dowell met with DPR in December 2015 which is when DPR informed them that there was CIP funding of approximately \$600K to redesign the west side of Virginia Highlands Park. DPR intended to have a redesign voted on and approved by the County Board in April 2016. If AHCA wanted a say in that redesign, it had to get something to the DPR in short order to have a chance of making it into DPR's final design to be sent to the County Board to be voted on in April 2016.



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- As a result, in early January, Natasha asked Rob Sidman to chair a committee come up with a proposal to present to the AHCA membership at the February 2016 meeting on what AHCA would like DPR to do in terms of their redesign of the west side of Virginia Highlands Park.
- Rob gave a presentation on forming the committee. He noted that last meeting, he sent around a sign-up sheet and posted to Nextdoor to get interested volunteers. Rob ended up with a total of 15 interested people who wanted to join the committee and help in the drafting of the proposal. The committee provided for participation through in-person meetings and electronic feedback. Drafts of the proposal were circulated for comment and edits.
- Rob then discussed the committee's proposal, which was to change the softball fields into an area where there would be open green space to meet the community's need for informal recreation and socializing. He explained that most of the rest of the document is supporting material drawn from a variety of sources that provided statistics about the neighborhood and park usage, as well as about the economic, social, and health benefits of parks, and that the references for this information are included in the document. It also contains graphics that show possible examples of design elements, such as gardens, pathways, water/play features, and open lawns.
- Rob explained that the committee worked to see where there was consensus among members. For example, some suggested a dog park while others were adamantly opposed. What there was agreement on was an open, multi-purpose green space that could be used for things like playing frisbee, sitting and reading on a bench, or picnicking on a lawn.
- Rob noted that if the AHCA membership wants something other than a new and improved status quo, we need to let the County



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know now so they do not spend their money designing and then building (to the tune of \$3 million) something the community doesn't want.

- Rob reminded the membership that if AHCA does not take action here, the County is going to act anyway. They have already allocated capital improvement resources to redesign the west side, which will likely include improving the softball fields, including seating, fencing, dugouts, and lighting.
- Discussion focused on several issues: (1) whether the proposal asked for too much such that the county would not take it seriously; (2) whether time was of the essence in getting a proposal submitted; and (3) whether the proposal really represented what the AHCA membership wanted.
- **MOTION** – Janet Dunkelburger moved to finalize the proposal and send it to the county. Motion was seconded. A friendly amendment was offered to send the county a letter instead of the proposal. The friendly amendment was not accepted. Motion passed (18 voted in favor, 15 voted against).
- Subsequent discussion revealed confusion about the value of sending the document without accompanying language.
- **MOTION** – Mike Dowell moved to send the County Board a letter, accompanied by the proposal as supporting documentation, requesting that the Board: (1) Direct DPR to begin a community-wide planning process to update the west side of VHP with the objective of achieving multi-use open green space that serves a broad cross section of Arlington County residents and a goal of updating the west side of VHP to include multi-use open green space within the next five years, and (2) Direct DPR to revise the Virginia Highlands Park Project, budgeted at \$592,000 as part of the 2016 Parks Maintenance Capital Program, to accommodate a multi-use



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green space update on the west side of VHP. Motion seconded.  
Motion passed (35 voted in favor, no one voted against).

- *Open Forum*
  - Mary Humphreys reminded everyone that AHCA has two NC projects that are going before the County Board for a vote in February – Nelly Custis Park and the Fern Street sidewalk. She encouraged everyone to attend the county board meeting and show their support.
- Meeting adjourned at 8:57 PM by President Natasha Atkins

I certify that these minutes are a true and accurate representation of the business conducted at the meeting and were adopted as the official meeting minutes by the membership of ACHA.

Date: 3/10/16

Robert Sidman

Recording Secretary